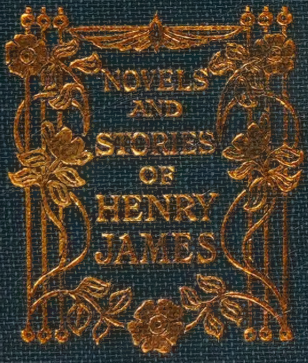

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THE GOLDEN BOWL

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
LONDON · BOMBAY · CALCUTTA · MADRAS
MELBOURNE

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
NEW YORK · BOSTON · CHICAGO
DALLAS · SAN FRANCISCO

THE MACMILLAN CO. OF CANADA, LTD.
TORONTO

THE GOLDEN BOWL

BY

HENRY JAMES

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON
1923

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First published in 1905

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

PREFACE

Among many matters thrown into relief by a refreshed acquaintance with *The Golden Bowl* what perhaps most stands out for me is the still marked inveteracy of a certain indirect and oblique view of my presented action; unless indeed I make up my mind to call this mode of treatment, on the contrary, any superficial appearance notwithstanding, the very straightest and closest possible. I have already betrayed, as an accepted habit, and even to extravagance commented on, my preference for dealing with my subject-matter, for "seeing my story," through the opportunity and the sensibility of some more or less detached, some not strictly involved, though thoroughly interested and intelligent, witness or reporter, some person who contributes to the case mainly a certain amount of criticism and interpretation of it. Again and again, on review, the shorter things in especial that I have gathered into this Series have ranged themselves not as my own impersonal account of the affair in hand, but as my account of somebody's impression of it—the terms of this person's access to it and estimate of it contributing thus by some fine little law to intensification of interest. The somebody is often, among my shorter tales I recognise, but an unnamed, unintroduced and (save by right of intrinsic wit)

unwarranted participant, the impersonal author's concrete deputy or delegate, a convenient substitute or apologist for the creative power otherwise so veiled and disembodied. My instinct appears repeatedly to have been that to arrive at the facts retailed and the figures introduced by the given help of some other conscious and confessed agent is essentially to find the whole business—that is, as I say, its effective interest—enriched *by the way*. I have in other words constantly inclined to the idea of the particular attaching case *plus* some near individual view of it; that nearness quite having thus to become an imagined observer's, a projected, charmed painter's or poet's—however avowed the "minor" quality in the latter—close and sensitive contact with it. Anything, in short, I now reflect, must always have seemed to me better—better for the process and the effect of representation, my irrepressible ideal—than the mere muffled majesty of irresponsible "authorship." Beset constantly with the sense that the painter of the picture or the chanter of the ballad (whatever we may call him) can never be responsible *enough*, and for every inch of his surface and note of his song, I track my uncontrollable footsteps, right and left, after the fact, while they take their quick turn, even on stealthiest tiptoe, toward the point of view that, within the compass, will give me most instead of least to answer for.

I am aware of having glanced a good deal already in the direction of this embarrassed truth—which I give for what it is worth; but I feel it come home to me afresh on recognising that the manner in which it betrays itself may be one of the liveliest sources of amusement in *The Golden Bowl*. It's not that the muffled majesty of authorship doesn't here *ostensibly* reign; but I catch myself again shaking

it off and disavowing the pretence of it while I get down into the arena and do my best to live and breathe and rub shoulders and converse with the persons engaged in the struggle that provides for the others in the circling tiers the entertainment of the great game. There is no other participant, of course, than each of the real, the deeply involved and immersed and more or less bleeding participants; but I nevertheless affect myself as having held my system fast and fondly, with one hand at least, by the manner in which the whole thing remains subject to the register, ever so closely kept, of the consciousness of but two of the characters. The Prince, in the first half of the book, virtually sees and knows and makes out, virtually represents to himself everything that concerns us — very nearly (though he doesn't speak in the first person) after the fashion of other reporters and critics of other situations. Having a consciousness highly susceptible of registration, he thus makes us see the things that may most interest us reflected in it as in the clean glass held up to so many of the "short stories" of our long list; and yet after all never a whit to the prejudice of his being just as consistently a foredoomed, entangled, embarrassed agent in the general imbroglio actor in the offered play. The function of the Princess, in the remainder, matches exactly with his; the register of *her* consciousness is as closely kept — as closely, say, not only as his own, but as that (to cite examples) either of the intelligent but quite unindividualised witness of the destruction of *The Aspern Papers*, or of the all-noting heroine of *The Spoils of Poynton*, highly individualised *though* highly intelligent; the Princess, in fine, in addition to feeling everything she has to, and to playing her part just in that proportion, duplicates, as it were, her value and becomes a compositional resource, and

of the finest order, as well as a value intrinsic. So it is that the admirably-endowed pair, between them, as I retrace their fortune and my own method, point again for me the moral of the endless interest, endless worth for "delight," of the compositional contribution. Their chronicle strikes me as quite of the stuff to keep us from forgetting that absolutely *no* refinement of ingenuity or of precaution need be dreamed of as wasted in that most exquisite of all good causes the appeal to variety, the appeal to incalculability, the appeal to a high refinement and a handsome wholeness of effect.

There are other things I might remark here, despite its perhaps seeming a general connexion that I have elsewhere sufficiently shown as suggestive; but I have other matter in hand and I take a moment only to meet a possible objection—should any reader be so far solicitous or even attentive—to what I have just said. It may be noted, that is. that the Prince, in the volume over which he nominally presides, is represented as in comprehensive cognition only of those aspects as to which Mrs. Assingham doesn't functionally—perhaps all too officiously, as the reader may sometimes feel it—supersede him. This disparity in my plan is, however, but superficial; the thing abides rigidly by its law of showing Maggie Verver at first through her suitor's and her husband's exhibitory vision of her, and of then showing the Prince, with at least an equal intensity, through his wife's; the advantage thus being that these attributions of experience display the sentient subjects themselves at the same time and by the same stroke with the nearest possible approach to a desirable vividness. It is the Prince who opens the door to half our light upon Maggie, just as it is she who opens it to half our light upon himself; the rest of our impression, in either case, coming straight from the

very motion with which that act is performed. We see Charlotte also at first, and we see Adam Verver, let alone our seeing Mrs. Assingham, and every one and every thing else, but as they are visible in the Prince's interest, so to speak—by which I mean of course in the interest of his being himself handed over to us. With a like consistency we see the same persons and things again but as Maggie's interest, *her* exhibitional charm, determines the view. In making which remark, with its apparently so limited enumeration of my elements, I naturally am brought up against the fact of the fundamental fewness of these latter—of the fact that my large demand is made for a group of agents who may be counted on the fingers of one hand. We see very few persons in *The Golden Bowl*, but the scheme of the book, to make up for that, is that we shall really see about as much of them as a coherent literary form permits. That was my problem, so to speak, and my *gageure*—to play the small handful of values really for all they were worth—and to work my system, my particular propriety of appeal, particular degree of pressure on the spring of interest, for all that this specific ingenuity itself might be. To have a scheme and a view of its dignity is of course congruously to work it out, and the "amusement" of the chronicle in question—by which, once more, I always mean the gathered cluster of all the *kinds* of interest—was exactly to see what a consummate application of such sincerities would give.

So much for some only of the suggestions of re-perusal here—since, all the while, I feel myself awaited by a pair of appeals really more pressing than either of those just met; a minor and a major appeal, as I may call them: the former of which I take first. I have so thoroughly "gone into" things, in an expository way, on the ground covered by

this collection of my writings, that I should still judge it superficial to have spoken no word for so salient a feature of our Edition as the couple of dozen decorative "illustrations." [1] This series of frontispieces contribute less to ornament, I recognise, than if Mr. Alvin Langdon Coburn's beautiful photographs, which they reproduce, had had to suffer less reduction; but of those that have suffered least the beauty, to my sense, remains great, and I indulge at any rate in this glance at our general intention for the sake of the small page of history thereby added to my already voluminous, yet on the whole so unabashed, memoranda. I should in fact be tempted here, but for lack of space, by the very question itself at large—that question of the general acceptability of illustration coming up sooner or later, in these days, for the author of any text putting forward illustrative claims (that is producing an effect of illustration) by its own intrinsic virtue and so finding itself elbowed, on that ground, by another and a competitive process. The essence of any representational work is of course to bristle with immediate images; and I, for one, should have looked much askance at the proposal, on the part of my associates in the whole business, to graft or "grow," at whatever point, a picture by another hand on my own picture—this being always, to my sense, a lawless incident. Which remark reflects heavily, of course, on the "picture-book" quality that contemporary English and American prose appears more and more destined, by the conditions of publication, to consent, however grudgingly, to see imputed to it. But a moment's thought points the moral of the danger.

Anything that relieves responsible prose of the duty of being, while placed before us, good enough,

[1] In the "New York" edition.

interesting enough and, if the question be of picture, pictorial enough, above all *in itself*, does it the worst of services, and may well inspire in the lover of literature certain lively questions as to the future of that institution. That one should, as an author, reduce one's reader, "artistically" inclined, to such a state of hallucination by the images one has evoked as doesn't permit him to rest till he has noted or recorded them, set up some semblance of them in his own other medium, by his own other art—nothing could better consort than *that*, I naturally allow, with the desire or the pretension to cast a literary spell. Charming, that is, for the projector and creator of figures and scenes that are as nought from the moment they fail to become more or less visible appearances, charming for this manipulator of aspects to see such power as he may possess approved and registered by the springing of such fruit from his seed. His own garden, however, remains one thing, and the garden he has prompted the cultivation of at other hands becomes quite another; which means that the frame of one's own work no more provides place for such a plot than we expect flesh and fish to be served on the same platter. One welcomes illustration, in other words, with pride and joy; but also with the emphatic view that, might one's "literary jealousy" be duly deferred to, it would quite stand off and on its own feet and thus, as a separate and independent subject of publication, carrying its text in its spirit, just as that text correspondingly carries the plastic possibility, become a still more glorious tribute. So far my invidious distinction between the writer's "frame" and the draughtsman's; and if in spite of it I could still make place for the idea of a contribution of value by Mr. A. L. Coburn to each of these volumes—and a contribution in as different a "medium" as possible

—this was just because the proposed photographic studies were to seek the way, which they have happily found, I think, not to keep, or to pretend to keep, anything like dramatic step with their suggestive matter. This would quite have disqualified them, to my rigour; but they were "all right," in the so analytic modern critical phrase, through their discreetly disavowing emulation. Nothing in fact could more have amused the author than the opportunity of a hunt for a series of reproducible subjects—such moreover as might best consort with photography—the reference of which to Novel or Tale should exactly be *not* competitive and obvious, should on the contrary plead its case with some shyness, that of images always confessing themselves mere optical symbols or echoes, expressions of no particular thing in the text, but only of the type or idea of this or that thing. They were to remain at the most small pictures of our "set" stage with the actors left out; and what was above all interesting was that they were first to be constituted.

This involved an amusing search which I would fain more fully commemorate; since it took, to a great degree, and rather unexpectedly and incalculably, the vastly, though but incidentally, instructive form of an inquiry into the street-scenery of London; a field yielding a ripe harvest of treasure from the moment I held up to it, in my fellow artist's company, the light of our fond idea—the idea, that is, of the aspect of things or the combination of objects that might, by a latent virtue in it, speak for its connexion with something in the book, and yet at the same time speak enough for its odd or interesting self. It will be noticed that our series of frontispieces, while doing all justice to our need, largely consists in a "rendering" of certain inanimate characteristics of London streets; the ability of

which to suffice to this furnishing forth of my Volumes ministered alike to surprise and convenience. Even at the cost of inconsistency of attitude in the matter of the "grafted" image, I should have been tempted, I confess, by the mere pleasure of exploration, abounding as the business at once began to do in those prizes of curiosity for which the London-lover is at any time ready to "back" the prodigious city. It wasn't always that I straightway found, with my fellow searcher, what we were looking for, but that the looking itself so often flooded with light the question of what a "subject," what "character," what a saving sense in things, is and isn't; and that when our quest was rewarded, it was, I make bold to say, rewarded in perfection. On the question, for instance, of the proper preliminary compliment to the first volume of *The Golden Bowl* we easily felt that nothing would so serve as a view of the small shop in which the Bowl is first encountered.

The problem thus was thrilling, for though the small shop was but a shop of the mind, of the author's projected world, in which objects are primarily related to each other, and therefore not "taken from" a particular establishment anywhere, only an image distilled and intensified, as it were, from a drop of the essence of such establishments in general, our need (since the picture was, as I have said, also completely to speak for itself) prescribed a concrete, independent, vivid instance, the instance that should oblige us by the marvel of an accidental rightness. It might so easily be wrong—by the act of being at all. It would have to be in the first place what London and chance and an extreme improbability should have made it, and then it would have to let us truthfully read into it the Prince's and Charlotte's and the Princess's visits. It of course on these terms long evaded us, but all the while really without

prejudice to our fond confidence that, as London ends by giving one absolutely everything one asks, so it awaited us somewhere. It awaited us in fact —but I check myself; nothing, I find now, would induce me to say where. Just so, to conclude, it was equally obvious that for the second volume of the same fiction nothing would so nobly serve as some generalised vision of Portland Place. Both our limit and the very extent of our occasion, however, lay in the fact that, unlike wanton designers, we had, not to "create" but simply to recognise—recognise, that is, with the last fineness. The thing was to induce the vision of Portland Place *to* generalise itself. This is precisely, however, the fashion after which the prodigious city, as I have called it, does on occasion meet halfway those forms of intelligence of it that *it* recognises. All of which meant that at a given moment the great featureless Philistine vista would itself perform a miracle, would become interesting, for a splendid atmospheric hour, as only London knows how; and that our business would be then to understand. But my record of that lesson takes me too far.

So much for some only of the suggestions of reperusal, and some of those of re-representation here, since, all the while, I feel myself awaited by an occasion more urgent than any of these. To re-read in their order my final things, all of comparatively recent date, has been to become aware of my putting the process through, for the latter end of my series (as well as, throughout, for most of its later constituents) quite in the same terms as the apparent and actual, the contemporary terms; to become aware in other words that the march of my present attention coincides sufficiently with the march of my original expression; that my apprehension fits, more concretely stated, without an effort or a struggle,

certainly without bewilderment or anguish, into the innumerable places prepared for it. As the historian of the matter sees and speaks, so my intelligence of it, as a reader, meets him halfway, passive, receptive, appreciative, often even grateful ; unconscious, quite blissfully, of any bar to intercourse, any disparity of sense between us. Into his very footprints the responsive, the imaginative steps of the docile reader that I consentingly become for him all comfortably sink ; his vision, superimposed on my own as an image in cut paper is applied to a sharp shadow on a wall, matches, at every point, without excess or deficiency. This truth throws into relief for me the very different dance that the taking in hand of my earlier productions was to lead me ; the quite other kind of consciousness proceeding from *that* return. Nothing in my whole renewal of attention to these things, to almost any instance of my work previous to some dozen years ago, was more evident than that no such active, appreciative process could take place on the mere palpable lines of expression—thanks to the so frequent lapse of harmony between my present mode of motion and that to which the existing footprints were due. It was, all sensibly, as if the clear matter being still there, even as a shining expanse of snow spread over a plain, my exploring tread, for application to it, had quite unlearned the old pace and found itself naturally falling into another, which might sometimes indeed more or less agree with the original tracks, but might most often, or very nearly, break the surface in other places. What was thus predominantly interesting to note, at all events, was the high spontaneity of these deviations and differences, which became thus things not of choice, but of immediate and perfect necessity : necessity to the end of dealing with the quantities in question at all.

No march, accordingly, I was soon enough aware, could possibly be more confident and free than this infinitely interesting and amusing *act* of re-appropriation ; shaking off all shackles of theory, unattended, as was speedily to appear, with humiliating uncertainties, and almost as enlivening, or at least as momentous, as, to a philosophic mind, a sudden large apprehension of the Absolute. What indeed could be more delightful than to enjoy a sense of the absolute in such easy conditions ? The deviations and differences might of course not have broken out at all, but from the moment they began so naturally to multiply they became, as I say, my very terms of cognition. The question of the "revision" of existing work had loomed large for me, had seemed even at moments to bristle with difficulties ; but that phase of anxiety, I was rejoicingly to learn, belonged all but to the state of postponed experience or to that of a prolonged and fatalistic indifference. Since to get and to keep finished and dismissed work well behind one, and to have as little to say to it and about it as possible, had been for years one's only law, so, during that flat interregnum, involving, as who should say, the very cultivation of unacquaintedness, creeping superstitions as to what it might really have been had time to grow up and flourish. Not least among these rioted doubtless the fond fear that any tidying-up of the uncanny brood, any removal of accumulated dust, any washing of wizened faces, or straightening of grizzled locks, or twitching, to a better effect, of superannuated garments, might let one in, as the phrase is, for expensive renovations. I make use here of the figure of age and infirmity, but in point of fact I had rather viewed the reappearance of the first-born of my progeny—a reappearance unimaginable save to some inheritance of brighter and more congruous material form, of stored-up braveries

of type and margin and ample page, of general dignity and attitude, than had mostly waited on their respective casual cradles—as a descent of awkward infants from the nursery to the drawing-room under the kind appeal of inquiring, of possibly interested, visitors. I had accordingly taken for granted the common decencies of such a case—the responsible glance of some power above from one nursling to another, the rapid flash of an anxious needle, the not imperceptible effect of a certain audible splash of soap-and-water ; all in consideration of the searching radiance of drawing-room lamps as compared with nursery candles. But it had been all the while present to me that from the moment a stitch should be taken or a hair-brush applied the *principle* of my making my brood more presentable under the nobler illumination would be accepted and established, and it was there complications might await me. I am afraid I had at stray moments wasted time in wondering what discrimination against the freedom of the needle and the sponge would be able to describe itself as not arbitrary. For it to confess to that taint would be of course to write itself detestable.

" Hands off altogether on the nurse's part ! " was, as a merely barbarous injunction, strictly conceivable ; but only in the light of the truth that it had never taken effect in any fair and stately, in any not vulgarly irresponsible re-issue of anything. Therefore it was easy to see that any such apologetic suppression as that of the " altogether," any such admission as that of a single dab of the soap, left the door very much ajar. Any request that an indulgent objector to drawing-room discipline, to the purification, in other words, of innocent childhood, should kindly measure out then the appropriate amount of ablutional fluid for the whole case, would, on twenty grounds, indubitably leave that invoked judge gaping. I had none the

less, I repeat, at muddled moments, seemed to see myself confusedly invoke him ; thanks to my but too naturally not being able to forecast the perfect grace with which an answer to all my questions was meanwhile awaiting me To expose the case frankly to a test—in other words to begin to re-read—was at once to get nearer all its elements and so, as by the next felicity, feel it purged of every doubt. It was the nervous postponement of that respectful approach that I spoke of just now as, in the connexion, my waste of time. This felt awkwardness sprang, as I was at a given moment to perceive, from my too abject acceptance of the grand air with which the term Revision had somehow, to my imagination, carried itself — and from my frivolous failure to analyse the content of the word. To revise is to see, or to look over, again—which means in the case of a written thing neither more nor less than to re-read it. I had attached to it, in a brooding spirit, the idea of re-writing—with which it was to have in the event, for my *conscious* play of mind, almost nothing in common. I had thought of re-writing as so difficult, and even so absurd, as to be impossible—having also indeed, for that matter, thought of re-reading in the same light. But the felicity under the test was that where I had thus ruefully prefigured two efforts there proved to be but one—and this an effort but at the first blush. What re-writing might be was to remain—it has remained for me to this hour—a mystery. On the other hand the act of revision, the act of seeing it again, caused whatever I looked at on any page to flower before me as into the only terms that honourably expressed it ; and the " revised " element in the present Edition is accordingly these terms, these rigid conditions of re-perusal, registered ; so many close notes, as who should say, on the particular vision of the matter

itself that experience had at last made the only possible one.

What it would be really interesting, and I daresay admirably difficult, to go into would be the very history of this effect of experience; the history, in other words, of the growth of the immense array of terms, perceptional and expressional, that, after the fashion I have indicated, in sentence, passage and page, simply looked over the heads of the standing terms—or perhaps rather, like alert winged creatures, perched on those diminished summits and aspired to a clearer air. What it comes back to, for the maturer mind—granting of course, to begin with, a mind accessible to questions of such an order—is this attaching speculative interest of the matter, or in vulgar parlance the inordinate intellectual "sport" of it: the how and the whence and the why these intenser lights of experience come into being and insist on shining. The interest of the question is attaching, as I say, because really half the artist's life seems involved in it—or doubtless, to speak more justly, the whole of his life intellectual. The "old" matter is there, re-accepted, re-tasted, exquisitely re-assimilated and re-enjoyed—believed in, to be brief, with the same "old" grateful faith (since wherever the faith, in a particular case, has become aware of a twinge of doubt I have simply concluded against the matter itself and left it out); yet for due testimony, for re-assertion of value, perforating as by some strange and fine, some latent and gathered force, a myriad more adequate channels. It is over the fact of such a phenomenon and its so possibly rich little history that I am moved just fondly to linger—and for the reason I glanced at above, that to do so is in a manner to retrace the whole growth of one's "taste," as our fathers used to say: a blessed comprehensive name for many of the things

deepest in us. The " taste " of the poet is, at bottom and so far as the poet in him prevails over everything else, his active sense of life : in accordance with which truth to keep one's hand on it is to hold the silver clue to the whole labyrinth of his consciousness. He feels this himself, good man—he recognises an attached importance—whenever he feels that consciousness bristle with the notes, as I have called them, of consenting re-perusal ; as has again and again publicly befallen him, to our no small edification, on occasions within recent view. It has befallen him most frequently, I recognise, when the supersessive terms of his expression have happened to be verse ; but that doesn't in the least isolate his case, since it is clear to the most limited intelligence that the title we give him is the only title of *general* application and convenience for those who passionately cultivate the image of life and the art, on the whole so beneficial, of projecting it. The seer and speaker under the descent of the god is the " poet," whatever his form, and he ceases to be one only when his form, whatever else it may nominally or superficially or vulgarly be, is unworthy of the god : in which event, we promptly submit, he isn't worth talking of at all. He becomes so worth it, and the god so adopts him, and so confirms his charming office and name, in the degree in which his impulse and passion are general and comprehensive—a definitional provision for them that makes but a mouthful of so minor a distinction, in the fields of light, as that between verse and prose

The circumstance that the poets then, and the more charming ones, *have* in a number of instances, with existing matter in hand, " registered " their renewals of vision, attests quite enough the attraction deeply working whenever the mind is, as I have said, accessible—accessible, that is, to the finer appeal of accumulated " good stuff " and to the interest of

taking it in hand at all. For myself, I am prompted to note, the " taking " has been to my consciousness, through the whole procession of this re-issue, the least part of the affair : under the first touch of the spring my hands were to feel themselves full ; so much more did it become a question, on the part of the accumulated good stuff, of seeming insistently to give and give. I have alluded indeed to certain lapses of that munificence — or at least to certain connexions in which I found myself declining to receive again on *any* terms ; but for the rest the sense of receiving has borne me company without a break ; a luxury making for its sole condition that I should intelligently attend. The blest good stuff, sitting up, in its myriad forms, so touchingly responsive to new care of any sort whatever, seemed to pass with me a delightful bargain, and in the fewest possible words. " Actively believe in us and then you'll see ! "—it wasn't more complicated than that, and yet was to become as thrilling as if conditioned on depth within depth. I saw therefore what I saw, and what these numerous pages record, I trust, with clearness ; though one element of fascination tended all the while to rule the business—a fascination, at each stage of my journey, on the noted score of that so shifting and uneven character of the tracks of my original passage. This by itself introduced the charm of suspense : what would the operative terms, in the given case, prove, under criticism, to have been—a series of waiting satisfactions or an array of waiting misfits ? The misfits had but to be positive and concordant, in the special intenser light, to represent together (as the two sides of a coin show different legends) just so many effective felicities and substitutes. But I couldn't at all, in general, forecast these chances and changes and proportions ; they could but show for what they were as I went ;

criticism after the fact was to find in them arrests and surprises, emotions alike of disappointment and of elation: all of which means, obviously, that the whole thing was a *living* affair.

The rate at which new readings, new conductors of sense interposed, to make any total sense at all right, became, to this wonderful tune, the very record and mirror of the general adventure of one's intelligence; so that one at all times quite marvelled at the fair reach, the very length of arm, of such a developed difference of measure as to what might and what mightn't constitute, all round, a due decency of "rendering." What I have been most aware of asking myself, however, is how writers, on such occasions of "revision," arrive at that successful resistance to the confident assault of the new reading which appears in the great majority of examples to have marked their course. The term that superlatively, that finally "renders," is a flower that blooms by a beautiful law of its own (the fiftieth part of a second often so suffices it) in the very heart of the gathered sheaf; it is *there* already, at any moment, almost before one can either miss or suspect it—so that in short we shall never guess, I think, the working secret of the revisionist for whom its colour and scent stir the air but as immediately to be assimilated. Failing our divination, too, we shall apparently not otherwise learn, for the simple reason that no revisionist I can recall has ever been communicative. "People don't do such things," we remember to have heard it, in this connexion, declared; in other words they don't really re-read—no, not *really*, at least they do so to the effect either of seeing the buried, the latent life of a past composition vibrate, at renewal of touch, into no activity and break through its settled and "sunk" surface at no point whatever—on

which conclusion, I hasten to add, the situation remains simple and their responsibility may lie down beside their work even as the lion beside the lamb ; or else they have in advance and on system stopped their ears, their eyes and even their very noses. This latter heroic policy I find myself glancing at, however, to wonder in what particular cases—failing, as I say, all the really confessed—it can have been applied. The actual non-revisionists (on any terms) are of course numerous enough, and with plenty to say for themselves ; their faith, clearly, is great, their lot serene and their peace, above all, equally protected and undisturbed. But the tantalising image of the revisionist who isn't one, the partial, the piecemeal revisionist, inconsequent and insincere, this obscure and decidedly *louche* personage hovers before me mainly, I think, but to challenge my belief. Where have we met him, when it comes to that, in the walks of interesting prose literature, and why assume that we *have* to believe in him before we are absolutely forced ?

If I turn for relief and contrast to some image of his opposite I at once encounter it, and with a completeness that leaves nothing to be desired, on any " old " ground, in presence of any " old " life, in the vast example of Balzac. He (and these things, as we know, grew behind him at an extraordinary rate) re-assaulted by supersessive terms, re-penetrated by finer channels, never had on the one hand seen or said all or had on the other ceased to press forward. His case has equal mass and authority—and beneath its protecting shade, at any rate, I move for the brief remainder of these remarks. We owe to the never-extinct operation of his sensibility, we have but meanwhile to recall, our greatest exhibition of felt finalities, our richest and hugest inheritance of imaginative prose. That by itself might intensify

for me the interest of this general question of the reviving and reacting vision—didn't my very own lucky experience, all so publicly incurred, give me, as my reader may easily make out, quite enough to think of. I almost lose myself, it may perhaps seem to him, in that obscure quantity; obscure doubtless because of its consisting of the manifold delicate things, the shy and illusive, the inscrutable, the indefinable, that minister to deep and quite confident processes of change. It is enough, in any event, to be both beguiled and mystified by evolutions so near home, without sounding strange and probably even more abysmal waters. Since, however, an agreeable flurry and an imperfect presence of mind might, on the former ground, still be such a source of refreshment, so the constant refrain humming through the agitation, "If only one *could* re-write, if only one *could* do better justice to the patches of crude surface, the poor morsels of consciously-decent matter that catch one's eye with their rueful reproach for old stupidities of touch!"—so that yearning reflexion, I say, was to have its superlative as well as its positive moments. It was to reach its maximum, no doubt, over many of the sorry businesses of *The American*, for instance, where, given the elements and the essence, the long-stored grievance of the subject bristling with a sense of over-prolonged exposure in a garment misfitted, a garment cheaply embroidered and unworthy of it, thereby most proportionately sounded their plaint. This sharpness of appeal, the claim for exemplary damages, or at least for poetic justice, was reduced to nothing, on the other hand, in presence of the altogether better literary manners of *The Ambassadors* and *The Golden Bowl*—a list I might much extend by the mention of several shorter pieces.

Inevitably, in such a case as that of *The American*,

and scarce less indeed in those of *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Princess Casamassima*, each of these efforts so redolent of good intentions baffled by a treacherous vehicle, an expertness too retarded, I could but dream the whole thing over as I went—as I read; and, bathing it, so to speak, in that medium, hope that, some still newer and shrewder critic's intelligence subtly operating, I shouldn't have breathed upon the old catastrophes and accidents, the old wounds and mutilations and disfigurements, wholly in vain. The same is true of the possible effect of this process of re-dreaming on many of these gathered compositions, shorter and longer; I have prayed that the finer air of the better form may sufficiently seem to hang about them and gild them over—at least for readers, however few, at all *curious* of questions of air and form. Nothing even at this point, and in these quite final remarks, I confess, could strike me as more pertinent than—with a great wealth of margin—to attempt to scatter here a few gleams of the light in which some of my visions have all sturdily and complacently repeated and others have, according to their kind and law, all joyously and blushingly renewed themselves. These have doubtless both been ways of remaining unshamed; though, for myself, on the whole, as I seem to make out, the interest of the watched renewal has been livelier than that of the accepted repetition. What has the affair been at the worst, I am most moved to ask, but an earnest invitation to the reader to dream again in my company and in the interest of his own larger absorption of my sense? The prime consequence on one's own part of re-perusal is a sense for ever so many more of the shining silver fish afloat in the deep sea of one's endeavour than the net of widest casting could pretend to gather in; an author's common courtesy dictating thus the best

general course for making that sense contagious—so beautifully tangled a web, when not so glorious a crown, does he weave by having at heart, and by cherishing there, the confidence he has invited or imagined. There is then absolutely no release to his pledged honour on the question of repaying that confidence.

The ideally handsome way is for him to multiply in any given connexion all the possible sources of entertainment—or, more grossly expressing it again, to intensify his whole chance of pleasure. (It all comes back to that, to my and your "fun"—if we but allow the term its full extension; to the production of which no humblest question involved, even to that of the shade of a cadence or the position of a comma, is not richly pertinent.) We have but to think a moment of such a matter as the play of *representational* values, those that make it a part, and an important part, of our taking offered things in that we should take them as aspects and visibilities—take them to the utmost as appearances, images, figures, objects, so many important, so many contributive items of the furniture of the world—in order to feel immediately the effect of such a condition at every turn of our adventure and every point of the representative surface. One has but to open the door to any forces of exhibition at all worthy of the name in order to see the imaging and qualifying agency called at once into play and put on its mettle. We may traverse acres of pretended exhibitory prose from which the touch that directly evokes and finely presents, the touch that operates for closeness and for charm, for conviction and illusion, for communication, in a word, is unsurpassably absent. All of which but means of course that the reader is, in the common phrase, "sold"—even when, poor passive spirit, systematically bewildered and bam-

boozled on the article of his dues, he may be but dimly aware of it. He has by the same token and for the most part, I fear, a scarce quicker sensibility on other heads, least of all perhaps on such a matter as his really quite swindled state when the pledge given for his true beguilement fails to ensure him that fullest experience of his pleasure which waits but on a direct reading *out* of the addressed appeal. It is scarce necessary to note that the highest test of any literary form conceived in the light of " poetry "—to apply that term in its largest literary sense—hangs back unpardonably from its office when it fails to lend itself to *vivâ-voce* treatment. We talk here, naturally, not of non-poetic forms, but of those whose highest bid is addressed to the imagination, to the spiritual and the esthetic vision, the mind led captive by a charm and a spell, an incalculable art. The essential property of such a form as that is to give out its finest and most numerous secrets, and to give them out most gratefully, under the closest pressure—which is of course the pressure of the attention articulately *sounded*. Let it reward as much as it will and can the soundless, the " quiet " reading, it still deplorably " muffs " its chance and its success, still trifles with the roused appetite to which it can never honestly be indifferent, by not having so arranged itself as to owe the flower of its effect to the act and process of apprehension that so beautifully asks most from it. It then infallibly, and not less beautifully, most responds ; for I have nowhere found vindicated the queer thesis that the right values of interesting prose depend all on withheld tests—that is on its being, for very pity and shame, but skimmed and scanted, shuffled and mumbled. Gustave Flaubert has somewhere in this connexion an excellent word—to the effect that any imaged prose that fails to be richly rewarding in return for

a competent utterance ranks itself as wrong through not being "in the conditions of life." The more we remain in *them*, all round, the more pleasure we dispense; the moral of which is—and there would be fifty other pertinent things to say about this—that I have found revision intensify at every step my impulse intimately to answer, by my light, to those conditions.

All of which amounts doubtless but to saying that as the whole conduct of life consists of things done, which do other things in their turn, just so our behaviour and its fruits are essentially one and continuous and persistent and unquenchable, so the act has its way of abiding and showing and testifying, and so, among our innumerable acts, are no arbitary, no senseless separations. The more we are capable of acting the less gropingly we plead such differences; whereby, with any capability, we recognise betimes that to "put" things is very exactly and responsibly and interminably to do them. Our expression of them, and the terms on which we understand that, belong as nearly to our conduct and our life as every other feature of our freedom; these things yield in fact some of its most exquisite material to the religion of doing. More than that, our literary deeds enjoy this marked advantage over many of our acts, that, though they go forth into the world and stray even in the desert, they don't to the same extent lose themselves; their attachment and reference to us, however strained, needn't necessarily lapse—while of the tie that binds us to *them* we may make almost anything we like. We are condemned, in other words, whether we will or no, to abandon and outlive, to forget and disown and hand over to desolation, many vital or social performances—if only because the traces, records, connexions, the very memorials we would fain preserve, are practically impossible to

rescue for that purpose from the general mixture. We give them up even when we wouldn't—it is not a question of choice. Not so on the other hand our really "done" things of this superior and more appreciable order—which leave us indeed all license of disconnexion and disavowal, but positively impose on us no such necessity. Our relation to them is essentially traceable, and in that fact abides, we feel, the incomparable luxury of the artist. It rests altogether with himself not to break with his values, not to "give away" his importances. Not to *be* disconnected, for the tradition of behaviour, he has but to feel that he is not; by his lightest touch the whole chain of relation and responsibility is reconstituted. Thus if he is always doing he can scarce, by his own measure, ever have done. All of which means for him conduct with a vengeance, since it is conduct minutely and publicly attested. Our noted behaviour at large may show for ragged, because it perpetually escapes our control; we have again and again to consent to its appearing in undress —that is in no state to brook criticism. But on all the ground to which the pretension of performance by a series of exquisite laws may apply there reigns one sovereign truth—which decrees that, as art is nothing if not exemplary, care nothing if not active, finish nothing if not consistent, the proved error is the base apologetic deed, the helpless regret is the barren commentary, and "connexions" are employable for finer purposes than mere gaping contrition.

HENRY JAMES.

BOOK FIRST

THE PRINCE

I

The Prince had always liked his London, when it had come to him ; he was one of the Modern Romans who find by the Thames a more convincing image of the truth of the ancient state than any they have left by the Tiber. Brought up on the legend of the City to which the world paid tribute, he recognised in the present London much more than in contemporary Rome the real dimensions of such a case. If it was a question of an *Imperium*, he said to himself, and if one wished, as a Roman, to recover a little the sense of that, the place to do so was on London Bridge, or even, on a fine afternoon in May, at Hyde Park Corner. It was not indeed to either of those places that these grounds of his predilection, after all sufficiently vague, had, at the moment we are concerned with him, guided his steps ; he had strayed simply enough into Bond Street, where his imagination, working at comparatively short range, caused him now and then to stop before a window in which objects massive and lumpish, in silver and gold, in the forms to which precious stones contribute, or in leather, steel, brass, applied to a hundred uses and abuses, were as tumbled together as if, in the insolence of the Empire, they had been the loot of far-off victories. The young man's movement, however, betrayed no consistency of attention—not even, for that matter, when one of his arrests had proceeded from possibilities in faces shaded, as they passed him

on the pavement, by huge beribboned hats, or more delicately tinted still under the tense silk of parasols held at perverse angles in waiting victorias. And the Prince's undirected thought was not a little symptomatic, since, though the turn of the season had come and the flush of the streets begun to fade, the possibilities of faces, on the August afternoon, were still one of the notes of the scene. He was too restless—that was the fact—for any concentration, and the last idea that would just now have occurred to him in any connexion was the idea of pursuit.

He had been pursuing for six months as never in his life before, and what had actually unsteadied him, as we join him, was the sense of how he had been justified. Capture had crowned the pursuit—or success, as he would otherwise have put it, had rewarded virtue; whereby the consciousness of these things made him for the hour rather serious than gay. A sobriety that might have consorted with failure sat in his handsome face, constructively regular and grave, yet at the same time oddly and, as might be, functionally almost radiant, with its dark blue eyes, its dark brown moustache and its expression no more sharply "foreign" to an English view than to have caused it sometimes to be observed of him with a shallow felicity that he looked like a "refined" Irishman. What had happened was that shortly before, at three o'clock, his fate had practically been sealed, and that even when one pretended to no quarrel with it the moment had something of the grimness of a crunched key in the strongest lock that could be made. There was nothing to do as yet, further, but feel what one *had* done, and our personage felt it while he aimlessly wandered. It was already as if he were married, so definitely had the solicitors, at three o'clock, enabled the date to be fixed, and by so few days was that date now distant.

He was to dine at half-past eight o'clock with the young lady on whose behalf, and on whose father's, the London lawyers had reached an inspired harmony with his own man of business, poor Calderoni, fresh from Rome and now apparently in the wondrous situation of being "shown London," before promptly leaving it again, by Mr. Verver himself, Mr. Verver whose easy way with his millions had taxed to such small purpose, in the arrangements, the principle of reciprocity. The reciprocity with which the Prince was during these minutes most struck was that of Calderoni's bestowal of his company for a view of the lions. If there was one thing in the world the young man at this juncture clearly intended it was to be much more decent as a son-in-law than lots of fellows he could think of had shown themselves in that character. He thought of these fellows, from whom he was so to differ, in English; he used, mentally, the English term to describe his difference, for, familiar with the tongue from his earliest years, so that no note of strangeness remained with him either for lip or for ear, he found it convenient, in life, for the greatest number of relations. He found it convenient, oddly, even for his relation with himself—though not unmindful that there might still, as time went on, be others, including a more intimate degree of *that* one, that would seek, possibly with violence, the larger or the finer issue—which was it?—of the vernacular. Miss Verver had told him he spoke English too well—it was his only fault, and he hadn't been able to speak worse even to oblige her. "When I speak worse, you see, I speak French," he had said; intimating thus that there were discriminations, doubtless of the invidious kind, for which that language was the most apt. The girl had taken this, she let him know, as a reflexion on her own French, which she had always so dreamed of making good,

of making better; to say nothing of his evident feeling that the idiom supposed a cleverness she was not a person to rise to. The Prince's answer to such remarks—genial, charming, like every answer the parties to his new arrangement had yet had from him—was that he was practising his American in order to converse properly, on equal terms as it were, with Mr. Verver. His prospective father-in-law had a command of it, he said, that put him at a disadvantage in any discussion; besides which he—well, besides which he had made to the girl the observation that positively, of all his observations yet, had most finely touched her.

"You know I think he's a *real* galantuomo—'and no mistake.' There are plenty of sham ones about. He seems to me simply the best man I've ever seen in my life."

"Well, my dear, why shouldn't he be?" the girl had gaily inquired.

It was this precisely that had set the Prince to think. The things, or many of them, that had made Mr. Verver what he was seemed practically to bring a charge of waste against the other things that, with the other people known to the young man, had failed of such a result. "Why his 'form,'" he had returned, "might have made one doubt."

"Father's form?" She hadn't seen it. "It strikes me he hasn't got any."

"He hasn't got mine—he hasn't even got yours."

"Thank you for 'even'!" the girl had laughed at him.

"Oh yours, my dear, is tremendous. But your father has his own. I've made that out. So don't doubt it. It's where it has brought him out—that's the point."

"It's his goodness that has brought him out," our young woman had, at this, objected.

"Ah, darling, goodness, I think, never brought any

one out. Goodness, when it's real, precisely, rather keeps people *in*." He had been interested in his discrimination, which amused him. "No, it's his *way*. It belongs to him."

But she had wondered still. "It's the American way. That's all."

"Exactly—it's all. It's all I say! It fits him —so it must be good for something."

"Do you think it would be good for *you*?" Maggie Verver had smilingly asked.

To which his reply had been just of the happiest. "I don't feel, my dear, if you really want to know, that anything much can now either hurt me or help me. Such as I am—but you'll see for yourself. Say, however, I *am* a galantuomo—which I devoutly hope: I'm like a chicken, at best, chopped up and smothered in sauce; cooked down as a *crême de volaille*, with half the parts left out. Your father's the natural fowl running about the *bassecour*. His feathers, his movements, his sounds—those are the parts that, with me, are left out."

"Ah as a matter of course—since you can't eat a chicken alive!"

The Prince hadn't been annoyed at this, but had been positive. "Well, I'm eating your father alive —which is the only way to taste him. I want to continue, and as it's when he talks American that he *is* most alive, so I must also cultivate it, to get my pleasure. He couldn't make one like him so much in any other language."

It mattered little that the girl had continued to demur—it was the mere play of her joy. "I think he could make you like him in Chinese."

"It would be an unnecessary trouble. What I mean is that he's a kind of result of his inevitable tone. My liking is accordingly *for* the tone—which has made him possible."

"Oh you'll hear enough of it," she laughed, "before you've done with us."

Only this in truth had made him frown a little. "What do you mean, please, by my having 'done' with you?"

"Why found out about us all there is to find."

He had been able to take it indeed easily as a joke. "Ah love, I *began* with that. I know enough, I feel, never to be surprised. It's you yourselves meanwhile," he continued, "who really know nothing. There are two parts of me"—yes, he had been moved to go on. "One is made up of the history, the doings, the marriages, the crimes, the follies, the boundless *bêtises* of other people—especially of their infamous waste of money that might have come to me. Those things are written—literally in rows of volumes, in libraries; are as public as they're abominable. Everybody can get at them, and you've both of you wonderfully looked them in the face. But there's another part, very much smaller doubtless, which, such as it is, represents my single self, the unknown, unimportant—unimportant save to *you*—personal quantity. About this you've found out nothing."

"Luckily, my dear," the girl had bravely said; "for what then would become, please, of the promised occupation of my future?"

The young man remembered even now how extraordinarily *clear*—he couldn't call it anything else—she had looked, in her prettiness, as she had said it. He also remembered what he had been moved to reply. "The happiest reigns, we are taught, you know, are the reigns without any history."

"Oh I'm not afraid of history!" She had been sure of that. "Call it the bad part, if you like—yours certainly sticks out of you. What was it else," Maggie Verver had also said, "that made me origin-

ally think of you? It wasn't—as I should suppose you must have seen—what you call your unknown quantity, your particular self. It was the generations behind you, the follies and the crimes, the plunder and the waste—the wicked Pope, the monster most of all, whom so many of the volumes in your family library are all about. If I've read but two or three yet, I shall give myself up but the more—as soon as I have time—to the rest. Where, therefore"—she had put it to him again—"without your archives, annals, infamies, would you have been?"

He recalled what, to this, he had gravely returned. "I might have been in a somewhat better pecuniary situation." But his actual situation under the head in question positively so little mattered to them that, having by that time lived deep into the sense of his advantage, he had kept no impression of the girl's rejoinder. It had but sweetened the waters in which he now floated, tinted them as by the action of some essence, poured from a gold-topped phial, for making one's bath aromatic. No one before him, never—not even the infamous Pope—had so sat up to his neck in such a bath. It showed for that matter how little one of his race could escape after all from history. What was it but history, and of *their* kind very much, to have the assurance of the enjoyment of more money than the palace-builder himself could have dreamed of? This was the element that bore him up and into which Maggie scattered, on occasion, her exquisite colouring drops. They were of the colour—of what on earth? of what but the extraordinary American good faith? They were of the colour of her innocence, and yet at the same time of her imagination, with which their relation, his and these people's, was all suffused. What he had further said on the occasion of which we thus represent him as catching the echoes from his own thought

while he loitered—what he had further said came back to him, for it had been the voice itself of his luck, the soothing sound that was always with him. "You Americans are almost incredibly romantic."

"Of course we are. That's just what makes everything so nice for us."

"Everything?" He had wondered.

"Well, everything that's nice at all. The world, the beautiful world—or everything in it that *is* beautiful. I mean we see so much."

He had looked at her a moment—and he well knew how she had struck him, in respect to the beautiful world, as one of the beautiful, the most beautiful things. But what he had answered was: "You see too much—that's what may sometimes make you difficulties. When you don't, at least," he had amended with a further thought, "see too little." But he had quite granted that he knew what she meant, and his warning perhaps was needless. He had seen the follies of the romantic disposition, but there seemed somehow no follies in theirs—nothing, one was obliged to recognise, but innocent pleasures, pleasures without penalties. Their enjoyment was a tribute to others without being a loss to themselves. Only the funny thing, he had respectfully submitted, was that her father, though older and wiser, and a man into the bargain, was as bad—that is as good—as herself.

"Oh he's better," the girl had freely declared—"that is he's worse. His relation to the things he cares for—and I think it beautiful—is absolutely romantic. So is his whole life over here—it's the most romantic thing I know."

"You mean his idea for his native place?"

"Yes—the collection, the Museum with which he wishes to endow it, and of which he thinks more, as you know, than of anything in the world. It's

the work of his life and the motive of everything he does."

The young man, in his actual mood, could have smiled again—smiled delicately, as he had then smiled at her. "Has it been his motive in letting me have you?"

"Yes, my dear, positively—or in a manner," she had said. "American City isn't, by the way, his native town, for, though he's not old, it's a young thing compared with him—a younger one. He started there, he has a feeling about it, and the place has grown, as he says, like the programme of a charity performance. You're at any rate a part of his collection," she had explained—"one of the things that can only be got over here. You're a rarity, an object of beauty, an object of price. You're not perhaps absolutely unique, but you're so curious and eminent that there are very few others like you—you belong to a class about which everything is known. You're what they call a *morceau de musée.*"

"I see. I have the great sign of it," he had risked—"that I cost a lot of money."

"I haven't the least idea," she had gravely answered, "what you cost"—and he had quite adored for the moment her way of saying it. He had felt even for the moment vulgar. But he had made the best of that.

"Wouldn't you find out if it were a question of parting with me? My value would in that case be estimated."

She had covered him with her charming eyes, as if his value were well before her. "Yes, if you mean that I'd pay rather than lose you."

And then there came again what this had made him say. "Don't talk about *me*—it's you who are not of this age. You're a creature of a braver and

finer one, and the *cinquecento*, at its most golden hour, wouldn't have been ashamed of you. It would of me, and if I didn't know some of the pieces your father has acquired I should rather fear for American City the criticism of experts. Would it at all events be your idea," he had then just ruefully asked, " to send me there for safety ? "

" Well, we may have to come to it."

" I'll go anywhere you want."

" We must see first—it will be only if we have to come to it. There are things," she had gone on, " that father puts away—the bigger and more cumbrous of course, which he stores, has already stored in masses, here and in Paris, in Italy, in Spain, in warehouses, vaults, banks, safes, wonderful secret places. We've been like a pair of pirates—positively stage pirates, the sort who wink at each other and say ' Ha-ha ! ' when they come to where their treasure is buried. Ours is buried pretty well everywhere—except what we like to see, what we travel with and have about us. These, the smaller pieces, are the things we take out and arrange as we can, to make the hotels we stay at and the houses we hire a little less ugly. Of course it's a danger, and we have to keep watch. But father loves a fine piece, loves, as he says, the good of it, and it's for the company of some of his things that he's willing to run his risks. And we've had extraordinary luck "—Maggie had made that point ; " we've never lost anything yet. And the finest objects are often the smallest. Values, in lots of cases, you must know, have nothing to do with size. But there's nothing, however tiny," she had wound up, " that we've missed."

" I like the class," he had laughed for this, " in which you place me ! I shall be one of the little pieces that you unpack at the hotels, or at the worst in the hired houses, like this wonderful one, and put

out with the family photographs and the new magazines. But it's something not to be so big that I have to be buried."

"Oh," she had returned, "you shall not be buried, my dear, till you're dead. Unless indeed you call it burial to go to American City."

"Before I pronounce I should like to see my tomb." So he had had, after his fashion, the last word in their interchange, save for the result of an observation that had risen to his lips at the beginning, which he had then checked, and which now came back to him. "Good, bad or indifferent, I hope there's one thing you believe about me."

He had sounded solemn even to himself, but she had taken it gaily. "Ah don't fix me down to 'one'! I believe things enough about you, my dear, to have a few left if most of them even go to smash. I've taken care of *that*. I've divided my faith into water-tight compartments. We must manage not to sink."

"You do believe I'm not a hypocrite? You recognise that I don't lie nor dissemble nor deceive? Is *that* water-tight?"

The question, to which he had given a certain intensity, had made her, he remembered, stare an instant, her colour rising as if it had sounded to her still stranger than he had intended. He had perceived on the spot that any *serious* discussion of veracity, of loyalty, or rather of the want of them, practically took her unprepared, as if it were quite new to her. He had noticed it before: it was the English, the American sign that duplicity, like "love," had to be joked about. It couldn't be "gone into." So the note of his inquiry was—well, to call it nothing else—premature; a mistake worth making, however, for the almost overdone drollery in which her answer instinctively sought refuge.

"Water-tight—the biggest compartment of all? Why it's the best cabin and the main deck and the engine-room and the steward's pantry! It's the ship itself—it's the whole line. It's the captain's table and all one's luggage—one's reading for the trip." She had images, like that, that were drawn from steamers and trains, from a familiarity with "lines," a command of "own" cars, from an experience of continents and seas, that he was unable as yet to emulate; from vast modern machineries and facilities whose acquaintance he had still to make, but as to which it was part of the interest of his situation as it stood that he could, quite without wincing, feel his future likely to bristle with them.

It was in fact, content as he was with his engagement and charming as he thought his affianced bride, his view of *that* furniture that mainly constituted our young man's "romance"—and to an extent that made of his inward state a contrast that he was intelligent enough to feel. He was intelligent enough to feel quite humble, to wish not to be in the least hard or voracious, not to insist on his own side of the bargain, to warn himself in short against arrogance and greed. Odd enough, of a truth, was his sense of this last danger—which may illustrate moreover his general attitude toward dangers from within. Personally, he considered, he hadn't the vices in question—and that was so much to the good. His race, on the other hand, had had them handsomely enough, and he was somehow full of his race. Its presence in him was like the consciousness of some inexpugnable scent in which his clothes, his whole person, his hands and the hair of his head, might have been steeped as in some chemical bath: the effect was nowhere in particular, yet he constantly felt himself at the mercy of the cause. He knew his antenatal history, knew it in every detail, and it was

a thing to keep causes well before him. What was his frank judgement of so much of its ugliness, he asked himself, but a part of the cultivation of humility? What was this so important step he had just taken but the desire for some new history that should, so far as possible, contradict, and even if need be flatly dishonour, the old? If what had come to him wouldn't do he must *make* something different. He perfectly recognised—always in his humility—that the material for the making had to be Mr. Verver's millions. There was nothing else for him on earth to make it with; he had tried before—had had to look about and see the truth. Humble as he was, at the same time he was not so humble as if he had known himself frivolous or stupid. He had an idea —which may amuse his historian—that when you were stupid enough to be mistaken about such a matter you did know it. Therefore he wasn't mistaken—his future *might* be scientific. There was nothing in himself at all events to prevent it. He was allying himself to science, for what was science but the absence of prejudice backed by the presence of money? His life would be full of machinery, which was the antidote to superstition, which was in its turn too much the consequence, or at least the exhalation, of archives. He thought of these things —of his not being at all events futile, and of his absolute acceptance of the developments of the coming age—to redress the balance of his being so differently considered. The moments when he most winced were those at which he found himself believing that, really, futility would have been forgiven him. Even *with* it, in that absurd view, he would have been good enough. Such was the laxity, in the Ververs, of the romantic spirit. They didn't, indeed, poor dears, know what, in that line—the line of futility—the real thing meant. *He* did—having

seen it, having tried it, having taken its measure. This was a memory in fact simply to screen out—much as, just in front of him while he walked, the iron shutter of a shop, closing early to the stale summer day, rattled down at the turn of some crank. There was machinery again, just as the plate glass, all about him, was money, was power, the power of the rich peoples. Well, he was *of* them now, of the rich peoples; he was on their side—if it wasn't rather the pleasanter way of putting it that they were on his.

Something of this sort was in any case the moral and the murmur of his walk. It would have been ridiculous—such a moral from such a source—if it hadn't all somehow fitted to the gravity of the hour, that gravity the oppression of which I began by recording. Another feature was the immediate nearness of the arrival of the contingent from home. He was to meet them at Charing Cross on the morrow: his younger brother, who had married before him, but whose wife, of Hebrew race, with a portion that had gilded the pill, was not in a condition to travel; his sister and her husband, the most anglicised of Milanesi, his maternal uncle, the most shelved of diplomatists, and his Roman cousin, Don Ottavio, the most *disponible* of ex-deputies and of relatives—a scant handful of the consanguineous who, in spite of Maggie's plea for hymeneal reserve, were to accompany him to the altar. It was no great array, yet it was apparently to be a more numerous muster than any possible to the bride herself, she having no wealth of kinship to choose from and not making it up on the other hand by loose invitations. He had been interested in the girl's attitude on the matter and had wholly deferred to it, giving him, as it did, a glimpse, distinctly pleasing, of the kind of discriminations she would in general be governed by—which were quite

such as fell in with his own taste. They hadn't natural relations, she and her father, she had explained; so they wouldn't try to supply the place by artificial, by make-believe ones, by any searching of the highways and hedges. Oh yes, they had acquaintances enough — but a marriage was an intimate thing. You asked acquaintances when you *had* your kith and kin—you asked them over and above. But you didn't ask them alone, to cover your nudity and look like what they weren't. She knew what she meant and what she liked, and he was all ready to take it from her, finding a good omen in both of the facts. He expected her, desired her, to have character; his wife *should* have it, and he wasn't afraid of her having too much. He had had in his earlier time to deal with plenty of people who had had it; notably with the three or four ecclesiastics, his great-uncle the Cardinal above all, who had taken a hand and played a part in his education: the effect of all of which had never been to upset him. He was thus fairly on the look-out for the characteristic in this most intimate, as she was to become, of his associates. He encouraged it when it appeared.

He felt therefore just at present as if his papers were in order, as if his accounts so balanced as they had never done in his life before and he might close the portfolio with a snap. It would open again doubtless of itself with the arrival of the Romans; it would even perhaps open with his dining to-night in Portland Place, where Mr. Verver had pitched a tent suggesting that of Alexander furnished with the spoils of Darius. But what meanwhile marked his crisis, as I have said, was his sense of the immediate two or three hours. He paused on corners, at crossings; there kept rising for him, in waves, that consciousness, sharp as to its source while vague as to its end, which I began by speaking of—the

consciousness of an appeal to do something or other, before it was too late, for himself. By any friend to whom he might have mentioned it the appeal could have been turned to frank derision. For what, for whom indeed but himself and the high advantages attached, was he about to marry an extraordinarily charming girl whose "prospects," of the solid sort, were as guaranteed as her amiability? He wasn't to do it assuredly ail for *her*. The Prince, as happened, however, was so free to feel and yet not to formulate that there rose before him after a little, definitely, the image of a friend whom he had often found ironic. He withheld the tribute of attention from passing faces only to let his impulse accumulate. Youth and beauty made him scarcely turn, but the image of Mrs. Assingham made him presently stop a hansom. *Her* youth, her beauty were things more or less of the past, but to find her at home, as he possibly might, would be "doing" what he still had time for, would put something of a reason into his restlessness and thereby probably soothe it. To recognise the propriety of this particular pilgrimage —she lived at a due distance, in long Cadogan Place —was already in fact to work it off a little. A perception of the propriety of formally thanking her, and of timing the act just as he happened to be doing —this, he made out as he went, was obviously all that had been the matter with him. It was true that he had mistaken the mood of the moment, misread it rather, superficially, as an impulse to look the other way—the other way from where his pledges had accumulated. Mrs. Assingham exactly represented and embodied his pledges—was in her pleasant person the force that had set them successively in motion. She had *made* his marriage, quite as truly as his papal ancestor had made his family—though he could scarce see what she had made it for

unless because she too was perversely romantic. He had neither bribed nor persuaded her, had given her nothing—scarce even till now articulate thanks; so that her profit—to think of it vulgarly—must have all had to come from the Ververs.

Yet he was far, he could still remind himself, from supposing that she had been grossly remunerated. He was wholly sure she hadn't; for if there were people who took presents and people who didn't she would be quite on the right side and of the proud class. Only then, on the other hand, her disinterestedness was rather awful—it implied, that is, such abysses of confidence. She was admirably attached to Maggie—whose possession of such a friend might moreover quite rank as one of her "assets"; but the great proof of her affection had been in bringing them, with her design, together. Meeting him during a winter in Rome, meeting him afterwards in Paris, and "liking" him, as she had in time frankly let him know, from the first, she had marked him for her young friend's own and had then, unmistakably, presented him in a light. But the interest in Maggie—that was the point—would have achieved but little without her interest in *him*. On what did that sentiment, unsolicited and unrecompensed, rest? what good, again—for it was much like his question about Mr. Verver—should he ever have done her? The Prince's notion of a recompense to women—similar in this to his notion of an appeal—was more or less to make love to them. Now he hadn't, as he believed, made love the least little bit to Mrs. Assingham—nor did he think she had for a moment supposed it. He liked in these days to mark them off, the women to whom he hadn't made love: it represented—and that was what pleased him in it—a different stage of existence from the time at which he liked to mark off the

women to whom he had. Neither, with all this, had Mrs. Assingham herself been either aggressive or resentful. On what occasion, ever, had she appeared to find him wanting? These things, the motives of such people, were obscure—a little alarmingly so; they contributed to that element of the impenetrable which alone slightly qualified his sense of his good fortune. He remembered to have read as a boy a wonderful tale by Allan Poe, his prospective wife's countryman—which was a thing to show, by the way, what imagination Americans *could* have: the story of the shipwrecked Gordon Pym, who, drifting in a small boat further toward the North Pole—or was it the South?—than any one had ever done, found at a given moment before him a thickness of white air that was like a dazzling curtain of light, concealing as darkness conceals, yet of the colour of milk or of snow. There were moments when he felt his own boat move upon some such mystery. The state of mind of his new friends, including Mrs. Assingham herself, had resemblances to a great white curtain. He had never known curtains but as purple even to blackness—but as producing where they hung a darkness intended and ominous. When they were so disposed as to shelter surprises the surprises were apt to be shocks.

Shocks, however, from these quite different depths, were not what he saw reason to apprehend; what he rather seemed to himself not yet to have measured was something that, seeking a name for it, he would have called the quantity of confidence reposed in him. He had stood still, at many a moment of the previous month, with the thought, freshly determined or renewed, of the general expectation—to define it roughly—of which he was the subject. What was singular was that it seemed not so much an expectation of anything in particular as a large

bland blank assumption of merits almost beyond notation, of essential quality and value. It was as if he had been some old embossed coin, of a purity of gold no longer used, stamped with glorious arms, medieval, wonderful, of which the " worth " in mere modern change, sovereigns and half-crowns, would be great enough, but as to which, since there were finer ways of using it, such taking to pieces was superfluous. That was the image for the security in which it was open to him to rest ; he was to constitute a possession, yet was to escape being reduced to his component parts. What would this mean but that practically he was never to be tried or tested ? What would it mean but that if they didn't " change " him they really wouldn't know—he wouldn't know himself—how many pounds, shillings and pence he had to give ? These at any rate for the present were unanswerable questions ; all that *was* before him was that he was invested with attributes. He was taken seriously. Lost there in the white mist was the seriousness in *them* that made them so take him. It was even in Mrs. Assingham, in spite of her having, as she had frequently shown, a more mocking spirit. All he could say as yet was that he had done nothing so far to break any charm. What should he do if he were to ask her frankly this afternoon what *was*, morally speaking, behind their veil. It would come to asking what they expected him to do. She would answer him probably : " Oh, you know, it's what we expect you to *be* ! " on which he would have no resource but to deny his knowledge. Would *that* dissipate the spell, his saying he had no idea ? What idea in fact could he have ? He also took himself seriously—made a point of it ; but it wasn't simply a question of fancy and pretension. His own estimate he saw ways, at one time and another, of dealing with ; but theirs, sooner or later, say what they

might, would put him to the practical proof. As the practical proof, accordingly, would naturally be proportionate to the cluster of his attributes, one arrived at a scale that he was not, honestly, the man to calculate. Who but a billionaire could say what was fair exchange for a billion? That measure was the shrouded object, but he felt really, as his cab stopped in Cadogan Place, a little nearer the shroud. He promised himself virtually to give the latter a twitch.

II

"THEY'RE not good days, you know," he had said to Fanny Assingham after declaring himself grateful for finding her, and then, with his cup of tea, putting her in possession of the latest news—the documents signed an hour ago, *de part et d'autre*, and the telegram from his backers, who had reached Paris the morning before, and who, pausing there a little, poor dears, seemed to think the whole thing a tremendous lark. "We're very simple folk, mere country cousins compared with you," he had also observed, "and Paris, for my sister and her husband, is the end of the world. London therefore will be more or less another planet. It has always been, as with so many of *us*, quite their Mecca, but this is their first real caravan; they've mainly known 'old England' as a shop for articles in india-rubber and leather, in which they've dressed themselves as much as possible. Which all means, however, that you'll see them, all of them, wreathed in smiles. We must be very easy with them. Maggie's too wonderful—her preparations are on a scale! She insists on taking in the *sposi* and my uncle. The others will come to me. I've been engaging their rooms at the hotel, and with all those solemn signatures of an hour ago that brings the case home to me."

"Do you mean you're afraid?" his hostess had amusedly asked.

"Terribly afraid. I've now but to wait to see the monster come. They're not good days; they're neither one thing nor the other. I've really *got* nothing, yet I've everything to lose. One doesn't know what still may happen."

The way she laughed at him was for an instant almost irritating; it came out, for his fancy, from behind the white curtain. It was a sign, that is, of her deep serenity, which worried instead of soothing him. And to be soothed, after all, to be tided over, in his mystic inpatience, to be told what he could understand and believe — that was what he had come for. "Marriage then," said Mrs Assingham, "is what you call the monster? I admit it's a fearful thing at the best; but, for heaven's sake, if that's what you're thinking of, don't run away from it."

"Ah, to run away from it would be to run away from *you*," the Prince replied; "and I've already told you often enough how I depend on you to see me through." He so liked the way she took this, from the corner of her sofa, that he gave his sincerity — for it *was* sincerity — fuller expression. "I'm starting on the great voyage—across the unknown sea; my ship's all rigged and appointed, the cargo's stowed away and the company complete. But what seems the matter with me is that I can't sail alone; my ship must be one of a pair, must have, in the waste of waters, a—what do you call it?—a consort. I don't ask you to stay on board with me, but I must keep your sail in sight for orientation. I don't in the least myself know, I assure you, the points of the compass. But with a lead I can perfectly follow. You *must* be my lead."

"How can you be sure," she asked, "where I should take you?"

"Why from your having brought me safely thus

far. I should never have got here without you. You've provided the ship itself, and if you've not quite seen me aboard you've attended me ever so kindly to the dock. Your own vessel is all conveniently in the next berth, and you can't desert me now."

She showed him again her amusement, which struck him even as excessive, as if, to his surprise, he made her also a little nervous; she treated him in fine as if he were not uttering truths but making pretty figures for her diversion. "My vessel, dear Prince?" she smiled. "What vessel in the world have I? This little house is all our ship, Bob's and mine—and thankful we are now to have it. We've wandered far, living, as you may say, from hand to mouth, without rest for the soles of our feet. But the time has come for us at last to draw in."

He made at this, the young man, an indignant protest. "You talk about rest—it's too selfish!—when you're just launching me on adventures?"

She shook her head with her kind lucidity. "Not adventures—heaven forbid! You've had yours—as I've had mine; and my idea has been all along that we should neither of us begin again. My own last, precisely, has been doing for you all you so prettily mention. But it consists simply in having conducted you to rest. You talk about ships, but they're not the comparison. Your tossings are over—you're practically *in* port. The port," she concluded, "of the Golden Isles."

He looked about, to put himself more in relation with the place; then after an hesitation seemed to speak certain words instead of certain others. "Oh I know where I *am*——! I do decline to be left, but what I came for of course was to thank you. If to-day has seemed for the first time the end of preliminaries, I feel how little there would have

been any at all without you. The first were wholly yours."

"Well," said Mrs. Assingham, "they were remarkably easy. I've seen them, I've *had* them," she smiled, "more difficult. Everything, you must feel, went of itself. So, you must feel, everything still goes."

The Prince quickly agreed. "Oh beautifully! But you had the conception."

"Ah, Prince, so had you!"

He looked at her harder a moment. "You had it first. You had it most."

She returned his look as if it had made her wonder. "I *liked* it, if that's what you mean. But you liked it surely yourself. I protest that I had easy work with you. I had only at last—when I thought it was time—to speak for you."

"All that's quite true. But you're leaving me all the same, you're leaving me—you're washing your hands of me," he went on. "However, that won't be easy; I won't *be* left." And he had turned his eyes about again, taking in the pretty room that she had just described as her final refuge, the place of peace for a world-worn couple, to which she had lately retired with "Bob." "I shall keep this spot in sight. Say what you will I shall need you. I'm not, you know," he declared, "going to give you up for anybody."

"If you're afraid—which of course you're not—are you trying to make me the same?" she asked after a moment.

He waited a minute too, then answered her with a question. "You say you 'liked' it, your undertaking to make my engagement possible. It remains beautiful for me that you did; it's charming and unforgetable. But still more it's mysterious and wonderful. *Why*, you dear delightful woman, did you like it?"

"I scarce know what to make," she said, "of such an inquiry. If you haven't by this time found out yourself, what meaning can anything I say have for you? Don't you really after all feel," she added while nothing came from him—"aren't you conscious every minute of the perfection of the creature of whom I've put you into possession?"

"Every minute—gratefully conscious. But that's exactly the ground of my question. It wasn't only a matter of your handing *me* over—it was a matter of your handing her. It was a matter of *her* fate still more than of mine. You thought all the good of her that one woman can think of another, and yet, by your account, you enjoyed assisting at her risk."

She had kept her eyes on him while he spoke, and this was what visibly determined a repetition for her. "Are you trying to frighten me?"

"Ah, that's a foolish view—I should be too vulgar. You apparently can't understand either my good faith or my humility. I'm awfully humble," the young man insisted; "that's the way I've been feeling to-day, with everything so finished and ready. And you won't take me for serious."

She continued to face him as if he really troubled her a little. "Oh you deep old Italians!"

"There you are," he returned—"it's what I wanted you to come to. That's the responsible note."

"Yes," she went on—"if you're 'humble' you must be dangerous." She had a pause while he only smiled; then she said; "I don't in the least want to lose sight of you. But even if I did I shouldn't think it right."

"Thank you for that—it's what I needed of you. I'm sure, after all, that the more you're with me the more I shall understand. It's the only thing in the world I want. I'm excellent, I really think, all round

—except that I'm stupid. I can do pretty well anything I see. But I've got to see it first." And he pursued his demonstration. "I don't in the least mind its having to be shown me—in fact I like that better. Therefore it is that I want, that I shall always want, your eyes. Through them I wish to look—even at any risk of their showing me what I mayn't like. For then," he wound up, "I shall know. And of that I shall never be afraid."

She might quite have been waiting to see what he would come to, but she spoke with a certain impatience. "What on earth are you talking about?"

But he could perfectly say: "Of my real honest fear of being 'off' some day, of being wrong, *without* knowing it. That's what I shall always trust you for—to tell me when I am. No—with you people it's a sense. We haven't got it—not as you have. Therefore——!" But he had said enough. "Ecco!" he simply smiled.

It was not to be concealed that he worked upon her, but of course she had always liked him. "I should be interested," she presently remarked, "to see some sense *you* don't possess."

Well, he produced one on the spot. "The moral, dear Mrs. Assingham. I mean always as you others consider it. I've of course something that in our poor dear backward old Rome sufficiently passes for it But it's no more like yours than the tortuous stone staircase—half-ruined into the bargain!—in some castle of our *quattrocento* is like the 'lightning elevator' in one of Mr. Verver's fifteen-storey buildings. Your moral sense works by steam—it sends you up like a rocket. Ours is slow and steep and unlighted, with so many of the steps missing that—well, that it's as short in almost any case to turn round and come down again."

"Trusting," Mrs. Assingham smiled, "to get up some other way?"

"Yes—or not to have to get up at all. However," he added, "I told you that at the beginning."

"Machiavelli!" she simply exclaimed.

"You do me too much honour. I wish indeed I had his genius. However, if you really believed I have his perversity you wouldn't say it. But it's all right," he gaily enough concluded; "I shall always have you to come to."

On this, for a little, they sat face to face; after which, without comment, she asked him if he would have more tea. All she would give him, he promptly signified; and he developed, making her laugh, his idea that the tea of the English race was somehow their morality, "made," with boiling water, in a little pot, so that the more of it one drank the more moral one would become. His drollery served as a transition, and she put to him several questions about his sister and the others, questions as to what Bob, in particular, Colonel Assingham, her husband, could do for the arriving gentlemen, whom, by the Prince's leave, he would immediately go to see. He was funny, while they talked, about his own people too, whom he described, with anecdotes of their habits, imitations of their manners and prophecies of their conduct, as more *rococo* than anything Cadogan Place would ever have known. This, Mrs. Assingham professed, was exactly what would endear them to her, and that in turn drew from her visitor a fresh declaration of all the comfort of his being able so to depend on her. He had been with her at this point some twenty minutes; but he had paid her much longer visits, and he stayed now as if to make his attitude prove his appreciation. He stayed moreover—*that* was really the sign of the hour—in spite of the nervous unrest that had brought him and that had in truth

much rather fed on the scepticism by which she had apparently meant to soothe it. She hadn't soothed him, and there arrived remarkably a moment when the cause of her failure gleamed out. He hadn't frightened her, as she called it—he felt that ; yet she was herself not at ease. She had been nervous, though trying to disguise it ; the sight of him, following on the announcement of his name, had shown her as disconcerted. This conviction, for the young man, deepened and sharpened ; yet with the effect too of making him glad in spite of it. It was as if, in calling, he had done even better than he intended. For it was somehow *important*—that was what it was —that there should be at this hour something the matter with Mrs. Assingham, with whom, in all their acquaintance, so considerable now, there had never been the least little thing the matter. To wait thus and watch for it was to know of a truth that there was something the matter with *him* ; since—strangely, with so little to go upon—his heart had positively begun to beat to the time of suspense. It fairly befell at last for a climax that they almost ceased to pretend—to pretend, that is, to cheat each other with forms. The unspoken had come up, and there was a crisis—neither could have said how long it lasted—during which they were reduced, for all interchange, to looking at each other on quite an inordinate scale. They might at this moment, in their positively portentous stillness, have been keeping it up for a wager, sitting for their photograph or even enacting a *tableau-vivant*.

The spectator of whom they would thus well have been worthy might have read meanings of his own into the intensity of their communion—or indeed, even without meanings, have found his account, esthetically, in some gratified play of our modern sense of type, so scantly to be distinguished from our

modern sense of beauty. Type was there, at the worst, in Mrs. Assingham's dark neat head, on which the crisp black hair made waves so fine and so numerous that she looked even more in the fashion of the hour than she desired. Full of discriminations against the obvious, she had yet to accept a flagrant appearance and to make the best of misleading signs. Her richness of hue, her generous nose, her eyebrows marked like those of an actress—these things, with an added amplitude of person on which middle age had set its seal, seemed to present her insistently as a daughter of the South, or still more of the East, a creature formed by hammocks and divans, fed upon sherbets and waited upon by slaves. She looked as if her most active effort might be to take up, as she lay back, her mandolin, or to share a sugared fruit with a pet gazelle. She was in fact however neither a pampered Jewess nor a lazy Creole; New York had been recordedly her birthplace and "Europe" punctually her discipline. She wore yellow and purple because she thought it better, as she said, while one was about it, to look like the Queen of Sheba than like a *revendeuse*; she put pearls in her hair and crimson and gold in her tea-gown for the same reason: it was her theory that nature itself had overdressed her and that her only course was to drown, as it was hopeless to try to chasten, the overdressing. So she was covered and surrounded with "things," which were frankly toys and shams, a part of the amusement with which she rejoiced to supply her friends. These friends were in the game—that of playing with the disparity between her aspect and her character. Her character was attested by the second movement of her face, which convinced the beholder that her vision of the humours of the world was not supine, not passive. She enjoyed, she needed the warm air of friendship, but the eyes of the

American city looked out, somehow, for the opportunity of it, from under the lids of Jerusalem. With her false indolence, in short, her false leisure, her false pearls and palms and courts and fountains, she was a person for whom life was multitudinous detail, detail that left her, as it at any moment found her, unappalled and unwearied.

"Sophisticated as I may appear"—it was her frequent phrase—she had found sympathy her best resource. It gave her plenty to do; it made her, as she also said, sit up. She had in her life two great holes to fill, and she described herself as dropping social scraps into them as she had known old ladies, in her early American time, drop morsels of silk into the baskets in which they collected the material for some eventual patchwork quilt. One of these gaps in Mrs. Assingham's completeness was her want of children; the other was her want of wealth. It was wonderful how little either, in the fulness of time, came to show; sympathy and curiosity could render their objects practically filial, just as an English husband who in his military years had "run" everything in his regiment could make economy blossom like the rose. Colonel Bob had, a few years after his marriage, left the army, which had clearly by that time done its laudable all for the enrichment of his personal experience, and he could thus give his whole time to the gardening in question. There reigned among the younger friends of this couple a legend, almost too venerable for historical criticism, that the marriage itself, the happiest of its class, dated from the far twilight of the age, a primitive period when such things—such things as American girls accepted as "good enough"—hadn't begun to be; so that the pleasant pair had been, as to the risk taken on either side, bold and original, honourably marked, for the evening of life, as discoverers of a kind of

hymeneal Northwest Passage. Mrs. Assingham knew better, knew there had been no historic hour, from that of Pocahontas down, when some young Englishman hadn't precipitately believed and some American girl hadn't, with a few more gradations, availed herself to the full of her incapacity to doubt; but she accepted resignedly the laurel of the founder, since she was in fact pretty well the *doyenne*, above ground, of her transplanted tribe, and since, above all, she *had* invented combinations, though she hadn't invented Bob's own. It was he who had done that, absolutely puzzled it out by himself from its first odd glimmer—resting upon it moreover, through the years to come, as proof enough in him by itself of the higher cleverness. If she kept her own cleverness up it was largely that he should have full credit. There were moments in truth when she privately felt how little—striking out as he had done—he could have afforded that she should show the common limits. But Mrs. Assingham's cleverness was in truth tested when her present visitor at last said to her: "I don't think, you know, that you're treating me quite right. You've something on your mind that you don't tell me."

It was positive too that her smile of reply was a trifle dim. "Am I obliged to tell you everything I have on my mind?"

"It isn't a question of everything, but it's a question of anything that may particularly concern me. Then you shouldn't keep it back. You know with what care I desire to proceed, taking everything into account and making no mistake that may possibly injure *her*."

Mrs. Assingham, at this, had after an instant an odd interrogation. "'Her'?"

"Her and him. Both our friends. Either Maggie or her father."

"I *have* something on my mind," Mrs. Assingham presently returned; "something has happened for which I hadn't been prepared. But it isn't anything that properly concerns you."

The Prince, with immediate gaiety, threw back his head. "What do you mean by 'properly'? I somehow see volumes in it. It's the way people put a thing when they put it—well, wrong. *I* put things right. What is it that has happened for me?"

His hostess had the next moment drawn spirit from his tone. "Oh I shall be delighted if you'll take your share of it. Charlotte Stant's in London. She has just been here."

"Miss Stant? Oh really?" The Prince expressed clear surprise—a transparency through which his eyes met his friend's with a certain hardness of concussion. "She has arrived from America?" he then quickly asked.

"She appears to have arrived this noon—coming up from Southampton—at an hotel. She dropped upon me after luncheon and was here for more than an hour."

The young man heard with interest, though not with an interest too great for his gaiety. "You think then I've a share in it? What *is* my share?"

"Why any you like—the one you seemed just now eager to take. It was you yourself who insisted."

He looked at her on this with conscious inconsistency, and she could now see that he had changed colour. But he was always easy. "I didn't know then what the matter was."

"You didn't think it could be so bad?"

"Do you call it very bad?" the young man asked.

"Only," she smiled, "because that's the way it seems to affect *you*."

He hesitated, still with the trace of his quickened

colour, still looking at her, still adjusting his manner. "But you allowed you were upset."

"To the extent—yes—of not having in the least looked for her. Any more," said Mrs. Assingham, "than I judge Maggie to have done."

The Prince thought; then as if glad to be able to say something very natural and true: "No—quite right. Maggie hasn't looked for her. But I'm sure," he added, "she'll be delighted to see her."

"*That* certainly"—and his hostess spoke with a different shade of gravity.

"She'll be quite overjoyed," the Prince went on. "Has Miss Stant now gone to her?"

"She has gone back to her hotel, to bring her things here. I can't have her," said Mrs. Assingham, "alone at an hotel."

"No; I see."

"If she's here at all she must stay with me."

He quite took it in. "So she's coming now?"

"I expect her at any moment. If you wait you'll see her."

"Oh," he promptly declared—"charming!" But this word came out as if a little in sudden substitution for some other. It sounded accidental, whereas he wished to be firm. That accordingly was what he next showed himself. "If it wasn't for what's going on these next days Maggie would certainly want to have her. In fact," he lucidly continued, "isn't what's happening just a reason to *make* her want to?" Mrs. Assingham, for answer, only looked at him, and this the next instant had apparently had more effect than if she had spoken. For he asked a question that seemed incongruous. "What has she come *for*?"

It made his companion laugh. "Why, for just what you say. For your marriage."

"Mine?"—He wondered.

"Maggie's—it's the same thing. It's 'for' your great event. And then," said Mrs. Assingham, "she's so lonely."

"Has she given you that as a reason?"

"I scarcely remember—she gave me so many. She abounds, poor dear, in reasons. But there's one that, whatever she does, I always remember for myself."

"And which is that?" He looked as if he ought to guess but couldn't.

"Why the fact that she has no home—absolutely none whatever. She's extraordinarily alone."

Again he took it in. "And also has no great means."

"Very small ones. Which is not however, with the expense of railways and hotels, a reason for her running to and fro."

"On the contrary. But she doesn't like her country."

"Hers, my dear man?—it's little enough 'hers.'" The attribution for the moment amused his hostess. "She has rebounded now—but she has had little enough else to do with it."

"Oh I say hers," the Prince pleasantly explained, "very much as at this time of day I might say mine. I quite feel, I assure you, as if the great place already more or less belonged to *me*."

"That's your good fortune and your point of view. You own—or you soon practically *will* own—so much of it. Charlotte owns almost nothing in the world, she tells me, but two colossal trunks—only one of which I've given her leave to introduce into this house. She'll depreciate to you," Mrs. Assingham added, "your property."

He thought of these things, he thought of everything; but he had always his resource at hand of turning all to the easy. "Has she come with designs

upon me ? " And then in a moment, as if even this were almost too grave, he sounded the note that had least to do with himself. " Est-elle toujours aussi belle ? " That was the furthest point, somehow, to which Charlotte Stant could be relegated.

Mrs. Assingham treated it freely. " Just the same. The person in the world, to my sense, whose looks are most subject to appreciation. It's all in the way she affects you. One admires her if one doesn't happen not to. So, as well, one criticises her."

" Ah that's not fair ! " said the Prince.

" To criticise her ? Then there you are ! You're answered."

" I'm answered." He took it, humorously, as his lesson—sank his previous self-consciousness, with excellent effect, in grateful docility. " I only meant that there are perhaps better things to be done with Miss Stant than to criticise her. When once you begin *that*, with any one——! " He was vague and kind.

" I quite agree that it's better to keep out of it as long as one can. But when one *must* do it——"

" Yes ? " he asked as she paused.

" Then know what you mean."

" I see. Perhaps," he smiled, " *I* don't know what I mean."

" Well, it's what, just now, in all ways, you particularly should know." Mrs. Assingham however made no more of this, having before anything else apparently a scruple about the tone she had just used. " I quite understand of course that, given her great friendship with Maggie, she should have wanted to be present. She has acted impulsively—but she has acted generously."

" She has acted beautifully," said the Prince.

" I say ' generously ' because I mean she hasn't

in any way counted the cost. She'll have it to count in a manner now," his hostess continued. "But that doesn't matter."

He could see how little. "You'll look after her."

"I'll look after her."

"So it's all right."

"It's all right," said Mrs. Assingham.

"Then why are you troubled?"

It pulled her up—but only for a minute. "I'm not—any more than you."

The Prince's dark blue eyes were of the finest and, on occasion, precisely, resembled nothing so much as the high windows of a Roman palace, of an historic front by one of the great old designers, thrown open on a feast-day to the golden air. His look itself at such times suggested an image—that of some very noble personage who, expected, acclaimed by the crowd in the street and with old precious stuffs falling over the sill for his support, had gaily and gallantly come to show himself: always moreover less in his own interest than in that of spectators and subjects whose need to admire, even to gape, was periodically to be considered. The young man's expression became after this fashion something vivid and concrete—a beautiful personal presence, that of a prince in very truth, a ruler, warrior, patron, lighting up brave architecture and diffusing the sense of a function. It had been happily said of his face that the figure thus appearing in the great frame was the ghost of some proudest ancestor. Whoever the ancestor now, at all events, the Prince was, for Mrs. Assingham's benefit, in view of the people. He seemed, leaning on crimson damask, to take in the bright day. He looked younger than his years; he was beautiful innocent vague. "Oh well, *I'm* not!" he rang out clear.

"I should like to *see* you, sir!" she said. "For

you wouldn't have a shadow of excuse." He showed how he agreed that he would have been at a loss for one, and the fact of their serenity was thus made as important as if some danger of its opposite had directly menaced them. The only thing was that if the evidence of their cheer was so established Mrs. Assingham had a little to explain her original manner, and she came to this before they dropped the question. "My first impulse is always to behave about everything as if I feared complications. But I don't fear them—I really like them. They're quite my element."

He deferred for her to this account of herself. "But still," he said, "if we're not in the presence of a complication."

She debated. "A handsome clever odd girl staying with one is always a complication."

The young man weighed it almost as if the question were new to him. "And will she stay very long?"

His friend gave a laugh. "How in the world can I know? I've scarcely asked her."

"Ah yes. You can't."

But something in the tone of it amused her afresh. "Do you think *you* could?"

"I?" He wondered.

"Do you think you could get it out of her for me —the probable length of her stay?"

He rose bravely enough to the occasion and the challenge. "I daresay if you were to give me the chance."

"Here it is then for you," she answered; for she had heard, within the minute, the stop of a cab at her door. "She's back."

III

It had been said as a joke, but as after this they awaited their friend in silence the effect of the silence was to turn the time to gravity—a gravity not dissipated even when the Prince next spoke. He had been thinking the case over and making up his mind. A handsome clever odd girl staying with one *was* a complication. Mrs. Assingham so far was right. But there were the facts—the good relations, from school-days, of the two young women, and the clear confidence with which one of them had arrived. "She can come, you know, at any time, to *us*."

Mrs. Assingham took it up with an irony beyond laughter. "You'd like her for your honeymoon?"

"Oh no, you must keep her for that. But why not after?"

She had looked at him a minute; then at the sound of a voice in the corridor they had got up. "Why not? You're splendid!"

Charlotte Stant, the next minute, was with them, ushered in as she had alighted from her cab and prepared for not finding Mrs. Assingham alone—this would have been to be noticed—by the butler's answer, on the stairs, to a question put to him. She could have looked at that lady with such straightness and brightness only from knowing that the Prince was also there—the discrimination of but a moment, yet which let him take her in still better than if she

had instantly faced him. He availed himself of the chance thus given him, for he was conscious of all these things. What he accordingly saw for some seconds with intensity was a tall strong charming girl who wore for him at first exactly the air of her adventurous situation, a reference in all her person, in motion and gesture, in free vivid yet altogether happy indications of dress, from the becoming compactness of her hat to the shade of tan in her shoes, to winds and waves and custom-houses, to far countries and long journeys, the knowledge of how and where and the habit, founded on experience, of not being afraid. He was aware at the same time that of this combination the "strong-minded" note was not, as might have been apprehended, the basis; he was now sufficiently familiar with English-speaking types, he had sounded attentively enough such possibilities, for a quick vision of differences. He had besides his own view of this young lady's strength of mind. It was great, he had ground to believe, but it would never interfere with the play of her extremely personal, her always amusing taste. This last was the thing in her—for she threw it out positively on the spot like a light—that she might have reappeared, during these moments, just to cool his worried eyes with. He saw her in her light: that immediate exclusive address to their friend was like a lamp she was holding aloft for his benefit and for his pleasure. It showed him everything—above all her presence in the world, so closely, so irretrievably contemporaneous with his own: a sharp, sharp fact, sharper during these instants than any other at all, even than that of his marriage, but accompanied, in a subordinate and controlled way, with those others, facial, physiognomic, that Mrs. Assingham had been speaking of as subject to appreciation. So they were, these others, as he met them again, and that

was the connexion they instantly established with him. If they had to be interpreted this made at least for intimacy. There was but one way certainly for *him*—to interpret them in the sense of the already known.

Making use then of clumsy terms of excess, the face was too narrow and too long, the eyes not large, and the mouth on the other hand by no means small, with substance in its lips and a slight, the very slightest, tendency to protrusion in the solid teeth, otherwise indeed well arrayed and flashingly white. But it was, strangely, as a cluster of possessions of his own that these things in Charlotte Stant now affected him; items in a full list, items recognised, each of them, as if, for the long interval, they had been "stored"—wrapped up, numbered, put away in a cabinet. While she faced Mrs. Assingham the door of the cabinet had opened of itself; he took the relics out one by one, and it was more and more each instant as if she were giving him time. He saw again that her thick hair was, vulgarly speaking, brown, but that there was a shade of tawny autumn leaf in it for "appreciation"—a colour indescribable and of which he had known no other case, something that gave her at moments the sylvan head of a huntress. He saw the sleeves of her jacket drawn to her wrists, but he again made out the free arms within them to be of the completely rounded, the polished slimness that Florentine sculptors in the great time had loved and of which the apparent firmness is expressed in their old silver and old bronze. He knew her narrow hands, he knew her long fingers and the shape and colour of her finger-nails, he knew her special beauty of movement and line when she turned her back, and the perfect working of all her main attachments, that of some wonderful finished instrument, something intently made for

exhibition, for a prize. He knew above all the extraordinary fineness of her flexible waist, the stem of an expanded flower, which gave her a likeness also to some long loose silk purse, well filled with gold-pieces, but having been passed empty through a finger-ring that held it together. It was as if, before she turned to him, he had weighed the whole thing in his open palm and even heard a little the chink of the metal. When she did turn to him it was to recognise with her eyes what he might have been doing. She made no circumstance of thus coming upon him, save so far as the intelligence in her face could at any moment make a circumstance of almost anything. If when she moved off she looked like a huntress, she looked when she came nearer like his notion, perhaps not wholly correct, of a muse. But what she said was simply : " You see you're not rid of me. How is dear Maggie ? "

It was to come soon enough by the quite unforced operation of chance, the young man's opportunity to ask her the question suggested by Mrs. Assingham shortly before her entrance. The license, had he chosen to embrace it, was within a few minutes all there—the license given him literally to inquire of this young lady how long she was likely to be with them. For a matter of the mere domestic order had quickly determined on Mrs. Assingham's part a withdrawal, of a few moments, which had the effect of leaving her visitors free. " Mrs. Betterman's there ? " she had said to Charlotte in allusion to some member of the household who was to have received her and seen her belongings settled ; to which Charlotte had replied that she had encountered only the butler, who had been quite charming. She had deprecated any action taken on behalf of her effects ; but her hostess, rebounding from accumulated cushions, evidently saw more in Mrs. Betterman's

non-appearance than could meet the casual eye. What she saw in short demanded her intervention, in spite of an earnest "Let *me* go!" from the girl, and a prolonged smiling wail over the trouble she was giving. The Prince was quite aware at this moment that departure, for himself, was indicated; the question of Miss Stant's installation didn't demand his presence; it was a case for one to go away—if one hadn't a reason for staying. He had a reason, however—of that he was equally aware; and he hadn't for a good while done anything more conscious and intentional than not quickly to take leave. His visible insistence—for it came to that—even demanded of him a certain disagreeable effort, the sort of effort he had mostly associated with acting for an idea. His idea was there, his idea was to find out something, something he wanted much to know, and to find it out not to-morrow, not at some future time, not in short with waiting and wondering, but if possible before quitting the place. This particular curiosity moreover confounded itself a little with the occasion offered him to satisfy Mrs. Assingham's own; he wouldn't have admitted that he was staying to ask a rude question—there was distinctly nothing rude in his having his reasons. It would be rude for that matter to turn one's back without a word or two on an old friend.

Well, as it came to pass, he got the word or two, for Mrs. Assingham's preoccupation was practically simplifying. The little crisis was of shorter duration than our account of it; duration would naturally have forced him to take up his hat. He was somehow glad, on finding himself alone with Charlotte, that he hadn't been guilty of that inconsequence. Not to be flurried was the kind of consistency he wanted, just as consistency was the kind of dignity. And why couldn't he have dignity when he had so much of the

good conscience, as it were, on which such advantages rested? He had done nothing he oughtn't—he had in fact done nothing at all. Once more, as a man conscious of having known many women, he could assist, as he would have called it, at the recurrent, the predestined phenomenon, the thing always as certain as sunrise or the coming round of saints' days, the doing by the woman of the thing that gave her away. She did it, ever, inevitably, infallibly—she couldn't possibly not do it. It was her nature, it was her life, and the man could always expect it without lifting a finger. This was *his*, the man's, any man's, position and strength—that he had necessarily the advantage, that he only had to wait with a decent patience to be placed, in spite of himself, it might really be said, in the right. Just so the punctuality of performance on the part of the other creature was her weakness and her deep misfortune—not less, no doubt, than her beauty. It produced for the man that extraordinary mixture of pity and profit in which his relation with her, when he was not a mere brute, mainly consisted; and gave him in fact his most pertinent ground of being always nice to her, nice about her, nice *for* her. She always dressed her act up, of course, she muffled and disguised and arranged it, showing in fact in these dissimulations a cleverness equal to but one thing in the world, equal to her abjection: she would let it be known for anything, for everything, but the truth of which it was made. That was what, exactly, Charlotte Stant would be doing now; that was the present motive and support, to a certainty, of each of her looks and motions. She was the twentieth woman, she was possessed by her doom, but her doom was also to arrange appearances, and what now concerned him was to learn how she proposed. He would help her, would arrange *with* her—to any

point in reason ; the only thing was to know what appearance could best be produced and best be preserved. Produced and preserved on her part of course ; since on his own there had been luckily no folly to cover up, nothing but a perfect accord between conduct and obligation.

They stood there together at all events, when the door had closed behind their friend, with a conscious strained smile and very much as if each waited for the other to strike the note or give the pitch. The young man held himself, in his silent suspense—only not more afraid because he felt her own fear. She was afraid of herself, however ; whereas, to his gain of lucidity, he was afraid only of her. Would she throw herself into his arms or would she be otherwise wonderful ? She would see what he would do—so their queer minute without words told him ; and she would act accordingly. But what could he do but just let her see that he would make anything, everything, for her, as honourably easy as possible ? Even if she should throw herself into his arms he would make that easy -easy, that is, to overlook, to ignore, not to remember, and not by the same token either to regret. This was not what in fact happened, though it was also not at a single touch, but by the finest gradations, that his tension subsided. " It's too delightful to be back ! " she said at last ; and it was all she definitely gave him—being moreover nothing but what any one else might have said. Yet with two or three other things that, on his response, followed it, it quite pointed the path, while the tone of it, and her whole attitude, were as far removed as need have been from the truth of her situation. The abjection that was present to him as of the essence quite failed to peep out, and he soon enough saw that if she was arranging she could be trusted to arrange. Good—it was all he asked ; and

all the more that he could admire and like her for it. The particular appearance she would, as they said, go in for was that of having no account whatever to give him—it would be in fact that of having none to give anybody—of reasons or of motives, of comings or of goings. She was a charming young woman who had met him before, but she was also a charming young woman with a life of her own. She would take it high—up, up, up, ever so high. Well then he would do the same ; no height would be too great for them, not even the dizziest conceivable to a young person so subtle. The dizziest seemed indeed attained when after another moment she came as near as she was to come to an apology for her abruptness.

" I've been thinking of Maggie, and at last I yearned for her. I wanted to see her happy—and it doesn't strike me I find you too shy to tell me I *shall*."

" Of course she's happy, thank God ! Only it's almost terrible, you know, the happiness of young good generous creatures. It rather frightens one. But the Blessed Virgin and all the Saints," said the Prince, " have her in their keeping."

" Certainly they have. She's the dearest of the dear. But I needn't tell you," the girl added.

" Ah," he returned with gravity, " I feel that I've still much to learn about her." To which he subjoined : " She'll rejoice awfully in your being with us."

" Oh you don't need me ! " Charlotte smiled. " It's her hour. It's a great hour. One has seen often enough, with girls, what it is. But that," she said, " is exactly why. Why I've wanted, I mean, not to miss it."

He bent on her a kind comprehending face. " You mustn't miss anything." He had got it, the

pitch, and he could keep it now, for all he had needed was to have it given him. The pitch was the happiness of his wife that was to be—the sight of that happiness as a joy for an old friend. It was, yes, magnificent, and not the less so for its coming to him suddenly as sincere, as nobly exalted. Something in Charlotte's eyes seemed to tell him this, seemed to plead with him in advance as to what he was to find in it. He was eager—and he tried to show her that too—to find what she liked; mindful as he easily could be of what the friendship had been for Maggie. It had been armed with the wings of young imagination, young generosity; it had been, he believed—always counting out her intense devotion to her father—the liveliest emotion she had known before the dawn of the sentiment inspired by himself. She hadn't, to his knowledge, invited the object of it to their wedding, hadn't thought of proposing to her, for a matter of a couple of hours, an arduous and expensive journey. But she had kept her connected and informed, from week to week, in spite of preparations and absorptions. "Oh I've been writing to Charlotte—I wish you knew her better": he could still hear, from recent weeks, this record of the fact, just as he could still be conscious, not otherwise than queerly, of the gratuitous element in Maggie's wish, which he had failed as yet to indicate to her. Older and perhaps more intelligent, at any rate, why shouldn't Charlotte respond—and be quite *free* to respond—to such fidelities with something more than mere formal good manners? The relations of women with each other were of the strangest, it was true, and he probably wouldn't have trusted here a young person of his own race. He was proceeding throughout on the ground of the immense difference—difficult indeed as it might have been to disembroil in this young person *her* race-quality. Nothing in her

definitely placed her; she was a rare, a special product. Her singleness, her solitude, her want of means, that is her want of ramifications and other advantages, contributed to enrich her somehow with an odd precious neutrality, to constitute for her, so detached yet so aware, a sort of small social capital. It was the only one she had—it was the only one a lonely gregarious girl *could* have, since few surely had in anything like the same degree arrived at it, and since this one indeed had compassed it but through the play of some gift of nature to which you could scarce give a definite name.

It wasn't a question of her strange sense for tongues, with which she juggled as a conjuror at a show juggled with balls or hoops or lighted brands —it wasn't at least entirely that, for he had known people almost as polyglot whom their accomplishment had quite failed to make interesting. He was polyglot himself, for that matter—as was the case too with so many of his friends and relations; for none of whom more than for himself was it anything but a common convenience. The point was that in this young woman it was a beauty in itself, and almost a mystery: so, certainly, he had more than once felt in noting on her lips that rarest, among the Barbarians, of all civil graces, a perfect felicity in the use of Italian. He had known strangers—a few, and mostly men—who spoke his own language agreeably; but he had known neither man nor woman who showed for it Charlotte's almost mystifying instinct. He remembered how, from the first of their acquaintance, she had made no display of it, quite as if English, between them, his English so matching with hers, were their inevitable medium. He had perceived all by accident—by hearing her talk before him to somebody else—that they had an alternative as good; an alternative in fact as much better as the amuse-

ment for him was greater in watching her for the slips that never came. Her account of the mystery didn't suffice : her recall of her birth in Florence and Florentine childhood ; her parents, from the great country, but themselves already of a corrupt generation, demoralised falsified polyglot well before her, with the Tuscan *balia* who was her first remembrance ; the servants of the villa, the dear *contadini* of the *podere*, the little girls and the other peasants of the next *podere*, all the rather shabby but still ever so pretty human furniture of her early time, including the good sisters of the poor convent of the Tuscan hills, the convent shabbier than almost anything else, but prettier too, in which she had been kept at school till the subsequent phase, the phase of the much grander institution in Paris at which Maggie was to arrive, terribly frightened and as a smaller girl, three years before her own ending of her period of five. Such reminiscences naturally gave a ground, but they hadn't prevented him from insisting that some strictly civil ancestor—generations back, and from the Tuscan hills if she would—made himself felt ineffaceably in her blood and in her tone. She knew nothing of the ancestor, but she had taken his theory from him, gracefully enough, as one of the little presents that make friendship flourish. These matters, however, all melted together now, though a sense of them was doubtless concerned, not unnaturally, in the next thing, of the nature of a surmise, that his discretion let him articulate. " You haven't, I rather gather, particularly liked your country ? " They would stick for the time to their English.

" It doesn't, I fear, seem particularly mine. And it doesn't in the least matter over there whether one likes it or not—that is to any one but one's self. But I didn't like it," said Charlotte Stant.

"That's not encouraging then to me, is it?" the Prince went on.

"Do you mean because you're going?"

"Oh yes, of course we're going. I've wanted immensely to go."

She waited. "But now?—immediately?"

"In a month or two—it seems to be the new idea." On which there was something in her face—as he imagined—that made him say: "Didn't Maggie write to you?"

"Not of your going at once. But of course you must go. And of course you must stay"—Charlotte was easily clear—"as long as possible."

"Is that what you did?" he laughed. "You stayed as long as possible?"

"Well, it seemed to me so—but I hadn't 'interests.' You'll have them—on a great scale. It's the country for interests," said Charlotte. "If I had only had a few I doubtless wouldn't have left it."

He waited an instant; they were still on their feet. "Yours then are rather here?"

"Oh mine!"—the girl smiled. "They take up little room, wherever they are."

It determined in him, the way this came from her and what it somehow did for her—it determined in him a speech that would have seemed a few minutes before precarious and in questionable taste. The lead she had given him made the difference, and he felt it as really a lift on finding an honest and natural word rise, by its license, to his lips. Nothing surely could be, for both of them, more in the note of a high bravery. "I've been thinking it all the while so probable, you know, that you would have seen your way to marrying."

She looked at him an instant, and during these seconds he feared for what he might have spoiled. "To marrying whom?"

"Why some good kind clever rich American."

Again his security hung in the balance—then she was, as he felt, admirable. "I tried every one I came across. I did my best. I showed I had come, quite publicly, *for* that. Perhaps I showed it too much. At any rate it was no use. I had to recognise it. No one would have me." Then she seemed to betray regret for his having to hear of her anything so disconcerting. She pitied his feeling about it; if he was disappointed she would cheer him up. "Existence, you know, all the same, doesn't depend on that. I mean," she smiled, "on having caught a husband."

"Oh — existence!" the Prince vaguely commented.

"You think I ought to argue for more than mere existence?" she asked. "I don't see why *my* existence — even reduced as much as you like to being merely mine—should be so impossible. There are things of sorts I should be able to have—things I should be able to be. The position of a single woman to-day is very favourable, you know."

"Favourable to what?"

"Why, just *to* existence—which may contain after all, in one way and another, so much. It may contain at the worst even affections; affections in fact quite particularly; fixed, that is, on one's friends. I'm extremely fond of Maggie for instance—I quite adore her. How could I adore her more if I were married to one of the people you speak of?"

The Prince gave a laugh. "You might adore *him* more——!"

"Ah but it isn't, is it," she asked, "a question of that?"

"My dear friend," he returned, "it's always a question of doing the best for one's self one can—without injury to others." He felt by this time that

they were indeed on an excellent basis ; so he went on again as if to show frankly his sense of its firmness. " I venture therefore to repeat my hope that you'll marry some capital fellow ; and also to repeat my belief that such a marriage will be more favourable to you, as you call it, than even the spirit of the age."

She looked at him at first only for answer, and would have appeared to take it with meekness hadn't she perhaps appeared a little more to take it with gaiety. " Thank you very much," she simply said ; but at that moment their friend was with them again. It was undeniable that as she came in Mrs. Assingham looked with a certain smiling sharpness from one of them to the other ; the perception of which was perhaps what led Charlotte, for reassurance, to pass the question on. " The Prince hopes so much I shall still marry some good person."

Whether it worked for Mrs. Assingham or not the Prince was himself, at this, more than ever reassured. He was *safe*, in a word—that was what it all meant ; and he had required to be safe. He was really safe enough for almost any joke. " It's only," he explained to their hostess, " because of what Miss Stant has been telling me. Don't we want to keep up her courage ? " If the joke was broad he hadn't at least begun it—not, that is, *as* a joke ; which was what his companion's address to their friend made of it. " She has been trying in America, she says, but hasn't brought it off."

The tone was somehow not what Mrs. Assingham had expected, but she made the best of it. " Well then," she replied to the young man, " if you take such an interest *you* must bring it off."

" And you must help, dear," Charlotte said unperturbed—" as you've helped, so beautifully, in such things before." With which, before Mrs. Assingham

could meet the appeal, she had addressed herself to the Prince on a matter much nearer to him. "*Your* marriage is on Friday ?—on Saturday ? "

"Oh on Friday, no ! For what do you take us ? There's not a vulgar omen we're neglecting. On Saturday, please, at the Oratory, at three o'clock—before twelve assistants exactly."

"Twelve including *me* ? "

It struck him—he laughed. "You'll make the thirteenth. It won't do ! "

"Not," said Charlotte, "if you're going in for 'omens.' Should you like me stay away ? "

"Dear no—we'll manage. We'll make the round number—we'll have in some old woman. They must keep them there for that, don't they ? " Mrs. Assingham's return had at last indicated for him his departure ; he had possessed himself again of his hat and approached her to take leave. But he had another word for Charlotte. "I dine to-night with Mr. Verver. Have you any message ? "

The girl seemed to wonder a little. "For Mr. Verver ? "

"For Maggie—about her seeing you early. That, I know, is what she'll like."

"Then I'll come early—thanks."

"I daresay," he went on, "she'll send for you. I mean send a carriage."

"Oh I don't require that, thanks. I can go, for a penny, can't I ? " she asked of Mrs. Assingham, "in an omnibus."

"Oh I say ! " said the Prince while Mrs. Assingham looked at her blandly.

"Yes, love—and I'll give you the penny. She shall *get* there," the good lady added to their friend.

But Charlotte, as the latter took leave of her, thought of something else. "There's a great favour, Prince, that I want to ask of you. I want, between

this and Saturday, to make Maggie a marriage-present."

"Oh I say!" the young man again soothingly exclaimed.

"Ah but I *must*," she went on. "It's really almost for that I came back. It was impossible to get in America what I wanted."

Mrs. Assingham showed anxiety. "What is it then, dear, you want?"

But the girl looked only at their companion. "That's what the Prince, if he'll be so good, must help me to decide."

"Can't *I*," Mrs. Assingham asked, "help you to decide?"

"Certainly, darling, we must talk it well over." And she kept her eyes on the Prince. "But I want him, if he kindly will, to go with me to look. I want him to judge with me and choose. That, if you can spare the hour," she said, "is the great favour I mean."

He raised his eyebrows at her—he wonderfully smiled. "What you came back from America to ask? Ah certainly then I must find the hour!" He wonderfully smiled, but it was after all rather more than he had been reckoning with. It went somehow so little with the rest that, directly, for him, it wasn't the note of safety; it preserved this character, at the best, but by being the note of publicity. Quickly, quickly, however, the note of publicity struck him as better than any other. In another moment even it seemed positively what he wanted; for what so much as publicity put their relation on the right footing? By this appeal to Mrs. Assingham it was established as right, and she immediately showed that such was her own understanding.

"Certainly, Prince," she laughed, "you must find the hour!" And it was really so express a license

from her, as representing friendly judgement, public opinion, the moral law, the margin allowed a husband about to be, or whatever, that, after observing to Charlotte that should she come to Portland Place in the morning he would make a point of being there to see her and so arrange easily with her about a time, he took his departure with the absolutely confirmed impression of knowing, as he put it to himself, where he was. Which was what he had prolonged his visit for. He was where he could stay.

IV

"I DON'T quite see, my dear," Colonel Assingham said to his wife the night of Charlotte's arrival—"I don't quite see, I'm bound to say, why you take it, even at the worst, so ferociously hard. It isn't *your* fault, after all, is it? I'll be hanged at any rate if it's mine."

The hour was late, and the young lady who had disembarked at Southampton that morning to come up by the "steamer special," and who had then settled herself at an hotel only to re-settle herself a couple of hours later at a private house, was by this time, they might hope, peacefully resting from her exploits. There had been two men at dinner, rather battered brothers-in-arms, of his own period, casually picked up by her host the day before, and when the gentlemen, after the meal, rejoined the ladies in the drawing-room, Charlotte, pleading fatigue, had already excused herself. The beguiled warriors however had stayed till after eleven—Mrs. Assingham, though finally quite without illusions, as she said, about the military character, was always mistress of a spell to old soldiers; and as the Colonel had come in before dinner only in time to dress he hadn't till this moment really been summoned to meet his companion over the situation that, as he was now to learn, their visitor's advent had created for them. It was actually more than midnight, the servants had been sent to bed, the

rattle of the wheels had ceased to come in through a window still open to the August air, and Robert Assingham had been steadily learning all the while what it thus behoved him to know. But the words just quoted from him presented themselves for the moment as the essence of his spirit and his attitude. He disengaged, he would be damned if he didn't—they were both phrases he repeatedly used—his responsibility. The simplest, the sanest, the most obliging of men, he habitually indulged in extravagant language. His wife had once told him, in relation to his violence of speech, that such excesses on his part made her think of a retired General whom she had once seen playing with toy soldiers, fighting and winning battles, carrying on sieges and annihilating enemies with little fortresses of wood and little armies of tin. Her husband's exaggerated emphasis was *his* box of toy soldiers, his military game. It harmlessly gratified in him, for his declining years, the military instinct; bad words, when sufficiently numerous and arrayed in their might, could represent battalions, squadrons, tremendous cannonades and glorious charges of cavalry. It was natural, it was delightful—the romance, and for her as well, of camp life and of the perpetual booming of guns. It was fighting to the end, to the death, but no one was ever killed.

Less fortunate than she, nevertheless, in spite of his wealth of expression, he hadn't yet found the image that described *her* favourite game; all he could do was practically to leave it to her, emulating her own philosophy. He had again and again sat up late to discuss those situations in which her finer consciousness abounded, but he had never failed to deny that anything in life, anything of hers, could be a situation for himself. She might be in fifty at once if she liked—and it was what women did like, at their ease, after all; there always being, when they had too much of

any, some man, as they were well aware, to get them out. He wouldn't at any price have one, of any sort whatever, of his own, or even be in one along with her. He watched her accordingly in her favourite element very much as he had sometimes watched at the Aquarium the celebrated lady who, in a slight, though tight, bathing-suit, turned somersaults and did tricks in the tank of water which looked so cold and uncomfortable to the non-amphibious. He listened to his companion to-night, while he smoked his last pipe, he watched her through her demonstration, quite as if he had paid a shilling. But it was true that, this being the case, he desired the value of his money. What was it, in the name of wonder, that she was so bent on being responsible *for* ? What did she pretend was going to happen, and what, at the worst, could the poor girl do, even granting she wanted to do anything ? What at the worst for that matter could she be conceived to have in her head ?

" If she had told me the moment she got here," Mrs. Assingham replied, " I shouldn't have my difficulty in finding out. But she wasn't so obliging, and I see no sign at all of her becoming so. What's certain is that she didn't come for nothing. She wants "— she worked it out at her leisure—" to see the Prince again. *That* isn't what troubles me. I mean that such a fact, *as* a fact, isn't. But what I ask myself is What does she want it *for* ? "

" What's the good of asking yourself if you know you don't know ? " The Colonel sat back at his own ease, an ankle resting on the other knee and his eyes attentive to the good appearance of an extremely slender foot which he kept jerking in its neat integument of fine-spun black silk and patent leather. It seemed to confess, this member, to consciousness of military discipline, everything about it being as polished and perfect, as straight and tight and trim, as

a soldier on parade. It went so far as to imply that some one or other would have "got" something or other, confinement to barracks or suppression of pay, if it hadn't been just as it was. Bob Assingham was distinguished altogether by a leanness of person, a leanness quite distinct from physical laxity, which might have been determined on the part of superior powers by views of transport and accommodation, and which in fact verged on the abnormal. He "did" himself as well as his friends mostly knew, yet remained hungrily thin, with facial, with abdominal cavities quite grim in their effect, and with a consequent looseness of apparel that, combined with a choice of queer light shades and of strange straw-like textures, of the aspect of Chinese mats, provocative of wonder at his sources of supply, suggested the habit of tropic islands, a continual cane-bottomed chair, a governorship exercised on wide verandahs. His smooth round head, with the particular shade of its white hair, was like a silver pot reversed; his cheekbones and the bristle of his moustache were worthy of Attila the Hun. The hollows of his eyes were deep and darksome, but the eyes within them were like little blue flowers plucked that morning. He knew everything that could be known about life, which he regarded as, for far the greater part, a matter of pecuniary arrangement. His wife accused him of a want alike of moral and of intellectual reaction, or rather indeed of a complete incapacity for either. He never went even so far as to understand what she meant, and it didn't at all matter, since he could be in spite of the limitation a perfectly social creature. The infirmities, the predicaments of men neither surprised nor shocked him, and indeed—which was perhaps his only real loss in a thrifty career—scarce even amused; he took them for granted without horror, classifying them after

their kind and calculating results and chances. He might in old bewildering climates, in old campaigns of cruelty and license, have had such revelations and known such amazements that he had nothing more to learn. But he was wholly content, despite his fondness, in domestic discussion, for the superlative degree ; and his kindness, in the oddest way, seemed to have nothing to do with his experience. He could deal with things perfectly, for all his needs, without getting near them.

This was the way he dealt with his wife, a large proportion of whose meanings he knew he could neglect. He edited for their general economy the play of her mind, just as he edited, savingly, with the stump of a pencil, her redundant telegrams. The thing in the world that was least of a mystery to him was his Club, which he was accepted as perhaps too completely managing, and which he managed on lines of perfect penetration. His connexion with it was really a masterpiece of editing. This was in fact, to come back, very much the process he might have been proposing to apply to Mrs. Assingham's view of what was now before them ; that is to their connexion with Charlotte Stant's possibilities. They wouldn't lavish on them *all* their little fortune of curiosity and alarm ; certainly they wouldn't spend their cherished savings so early in the day. He liked Charlotte, moreover, who was a smooth and compact inmate and whom he felt as, with her instincts that made against waste, much more of his own sort than his wife. He could talk with her about Fanny almost better than he could talk with Fanny about Charlotte. However, he made at present the best of the latter necessity, even to the pressing of the question he has been noted as having last uttered. " If you can't think what to be afraid of, wait till you *can* think. Then you'll do it much better. Or otherwise, if that's waiting too long, find

out from *her*. Don't try to find out from *me*. Ask her herself."

Mrs. Assingham denied, as we know, that her husband had a play of mind ; so that she could, on her side, treat these remarks only as if they had been senseless physical gestures or nervous facial movements. She overlooked them as from habit and kindness ; yet there was no one to whom she talked so persistently of such intimate things. "It's her friendship with Maggie that's the immense complication. Because *that*," she audibly mused, "is so natural."

"Then why can't she have come out for it ? "

"She came out," Mrs. Assingham continued to meditate, "because she hates America. There was no place for her there —she didn't fit in. She wasn't in sympathy—no more were the people she saw. Then it's hideously dear ; she can't, on her means, begin to live there. Not at all as she can, in a way, here."

"In the way, you mean, of living with *us* ? "

"Of living with any one. She can't live by visits alone—and she doesn't want to. She's too good for it even if she could. But she will—she *must*, sooner or later -stay with *them*. Maggie will want her—Maggie will make her. Besides, she'll want to herself."

"Then why won't that do," the Colonel asked, "for you to think it's what she has come for ? "

"How will it do, *how* ? "—she went on as without hearing him. "That's what one keeps feeling."

"Why shouldn't it do beautifully ? "

"That anything of the past," she brooded, "should come back *now* ? How will it do, how will it do ?

"It will do, I daresay, without your wringing your hands over it. When, my dear," the Colonel pursued as he smoked, "have you ever seen anything of yours —anything that you've done—*not* do ? "

"Ah I didn't do this!" It brought her answer straight. "I didn't bring her back."

"Did you expect her to stay over there all her days to oblige you?"

"Not a bit—for I shouldn't have minded her coming after their marriage. It's her coming this way before." To which she added with inconsequence: "I'm too sorry for her—of course she can't enjoy it. But I don't see what perversity rides her. She needn't have looked it all so in the face—as she doesn't do it, I suppose, simply for discipline. It's almost—that's the bore of it—discipline to *me*."

"Perhaps then," said Bob Assingham, "that's what has been her idea. Take it, for God's sake, as discipline to you and have done with it. It will do," he added, "for discipline to me as well."

She was far, however, from having done with it; it was a situation with such different sides, as she said, and to none of which one could, in justice, be blind. "It isn't in the least, you know, for instance, that I believe she's bad. Never, never," Mrs. Assingham declared. "I don't think that of her."

"Then why isn't that enough?"

Nothing was enough, Mrs. Assingham signified, but that she should develop her thought. "She doesn't deliberately intend, she doesn't consciously wish, the least complication. It's perfectly true that she thinks Maggie a dear—as who doesn't? She's incapable of any *plan* to hurt a hair of her head. Yet here she is—and there *they* are," she wound up.

Her husband again for a little smoked in silence. "What in the world, between them, ever took place?"

"Between Charlotte and the Prince? Why nothing—except their having to recognise that nothing *could*. That was their little romance—it was even their little tragedy."

"But what the deuce did they *do*?"

"Do? They fell in love with each other—but, seeing it wasn't possible, gave each other up."

"Then where was the romance?"

"Why in their frustration, in their having the courage to look the facts in the face."

"What facts?" the Colonel went on.

"Well, to begin with, that of their neither of them having the means to marry. If she had had even a little—a little, I mean, for two—I believe he would bravely have done it." After which, as her husband but emitted an odd vague sound, she corrected herself. "I mean if he himself had had only a little—or a little more than a little, a little for a prince. They would have done what they could"—she did them justice—"if there had been a way. But there wasn't a way, and Charlotte, quite to her honour, I consider, understood it. He *had* to have money—it was a question of life and death. It wouldn't have been a bit amusing, either, to marry him as a pauper—I mean leaving him one. That was what she had—as *he* had—the reason to see."

"And their reason is what you call their romance?"

She looked at him a moment. "What do you want more?"

"Didn't *he*," the Colonel inquired, "want anything more? Or didn't, for that matter, poor Charlotte herself?"

She kept her eyes on him; there was a manner in it that half answered. "They were thoroughly in love. She might have been his—" She checked herself; she even for a minute lost herself. "She might have been anything she liked—except his wife."

"But she wasn't," said the Colonel very smokingly.

"She wasn't," Mrs. Assingham echoed.

The echo, not loud but deep, filled for a little the

room. He seemed to listen to it die away ; then he began again. " How are you sure ? "

She waited before saying, but when she spoke it was definite. " There wasn't time."

He had a small laugh for her reason ; he might have expected some other. " Does it take so much time ? "

She herself, however, remained serious. " It takes more than they had."

He was detached, but he wondered. " What was the matter with their time ? " After which, as, remembering it all, living it over and piecing it together, she only considered, " You mean that you came in with *your* idea ? " he demanded.

It brought her quickly to the point, and as if also in a measure to answer herself. " Not a bit of it—*then*. But you surely recall," she went on, " the way, a year ago, everything took place. They had parted before he had ever heard of Maggie."

" Why hadn't he heard of her from Charlotte herself ? "

" Because she had never spoken of her."

" Is that also," the Colonel inquired, " what she has told you ? "

" I'm not speaking," his wife returned, " of what she has told me. That's one thing. I'm speaking of what I know by myself. That's another."

" You feel in other words that she lies to you ? " Bob Assingham more sociably asked.

She neglected the question, treating it as gross. " She never so much, at the time, as named Maggie."

It was so positive that it appeared to strike him. " It's he then who has told you ? "

She after a moment admitted it. " It's he."

" And he doesn't lie ? "

" No—to do him justice. I believe he absolutely doesn't. If I hadn't believed it," Mrs. Assingham

declared for her general justification, "I'd have had nothing to do with him—that is in this connexion. He's a gentleman—I mean *all* as much of one as he ought to be. And he had nothing to gain. That helps," she added, "even a gentleman. It was I who named Maggie to him—a year from last May. He had never heard of her before."

"Then it's grave," said the Colonel.

She briefly weighed it. "Do you mean grave for me?"

"Oh that everything's grave for 'you' is what we take for granted and are fundamentally talking about. It's grave—it *was*—for Charlotte. And it's grave for Maggie. That is it *was*—when he did see her. Or when she did see him."

"You don't torment me as much as you would like," she presently went on, "because you think of nothing that I haven't a thousand times thought of, and because I think of everything that you never will. It would all," she recognised, "have been grave if it hadn't all been right. You can't make out," she contended, "that we got to Rome before the end of February."

He more than agreed. "There's nothing in life, my dear, that I *can* make out."

Well, there was apparently nothing in life that she at real need couldn't. "Charlotte, who had been there that year from early, early in November, left suddenly, you'll quite remember, about the tenth of April. She was to have stayed on—she was to have stayed, naturally, more or less, for us; and she was to have stayed all the more that the Ververs, due all winter, but delayed, week after week, in Paris, were at last really coming. They were coming—that is Maggie was—largely to see her, and above all to be with her *there*. It was all altered—by Charlotte's going to Florence. She went from one day to the

other—you forget everything. She gave her reasons, but I thought it odd at the time ; I had a sense that something must have happened. The difficulty was that though I knew a little I didn't know enough. I didn't know her relation with him had been, as you say, a 'near' thing—that is I didn't know *how* near. The poor girl's departure was a flight—she went to save herself."

He had listened more than he showed—as came out in his tone. "To save herself ? "

"Well, also really I think to save him too. I saw it afterwards—I see it all now. He'd have been sorry—he didn't want to hurt her."

"Oh I daresay," the Colonel laughed. "They generally don't ! "

"At all events," his wife pursued, "she escaped—they both did ; for they had had simply to face it. Their marriage couldn't be, and, if that was so, the sooner they put the Apennines between them the better. It had taken them, it's true, some time to feel this and to find it out. They had met constantly, and not always publicly, all that winter ; they had met more than was known—though it was a good deal known. More, certainly," she said, "than I then imagined—though I don't know what difference it would after all have made with me. I liked him, I thought him charming, from the first of our knowing him ; and now, after more than a year, he has done nothing to spoil it. And there are things he might have done—things that many men easily would. Therefore I believe in him, and I was right, at first, in knowing I was going to. So I haven't "—and she stated it as she might have quoted from a slate, after adding up the items, the sum of a column of figures—"so I haven't, I say to myself, been a fool."

"Well, are you trying to make out that I've said you have ? All their case wants, at any rate," Bob

Assingham declared, "is that you should leave it well alone. It's theirs now; they've bought it, over the counter, and paid for it. It has ceased to be yours."

"Of which case," she asked, "are you speaking?'

He smoked a minute: then with a groan: "Lord, are there so many?"

"There's Maggie's and the Prince's, and there's the Prince's and Charlotte's."

"Oh yes; and then," the Colonel scoffed, "there's Charlotte's and the Prince's."

"There's Maggie's and Charlotte's," she went on —"and there's also Maggie's and mine. I think too that there's Charlotte's and mine. Yes," she mused, "Charlotte's and mine is certainly a case. In short, you see, there are plenty. But I mean," she said, "to keep my head."

"Are we to settle them all," he inquired, "to-night?"

"I should lose it if things had happened otherwise —if I had acted with any folly." She had gone on in her earnestness, unheeding of his question. "I shouldn't be able to bear that now. But my good conscience is my strength; no one can accuse me. The Ververs came on to Rome alone—Charlotte, after their days with her in Florence, had decided about America. Maggie, I daresay, had helped her; she must have made her a present, and a handsome one, so that many things were easy. Charlotte left them, came to England, 'joined' somebody or other, sailed for New York. I have still her letter from Milan, telling me; I didn't know at the moment all that was behind it, but I felt in it nevertheless the undertaking of a new life. Certainly, in any case, it cleared *that* air—I mean the dear old Roman, in which we were steeped. It left the field free—it gave me a free hand. There was no question for me

of anybody else when I brought the two others together. More than that, there was no question for *them*. So you see," she concluded, " where that puts me."

She got up, on the words, very much as if they were the blue daylight towards which, through a darksome tunnel, she had been pushing her way, and the elation in her voice, combined with her recovered alertness, might have signified the sharp whistle of the train that shoots at last into the open. She turned about the room ; she looked out a moment into the August night ; she stopped here and there before the flowers in bowls and vases. Yes, it was distinctly as if she had proved what was needing proof, as if the issue of her operation had been almost unexpectedly a success. Old arithmetic had perhaps been fallacious, but the new settled the question. Her husband oddly, however, kept his place without apparently measuring these results. As he had been amused at her intensity, so he wasn't uplifted by her relief ; his interest might in fact have been more enlisted than he allowed. " Do you mean," he presently asked, " that he had already forgot about Charlotte ? "

She faced round as if he had touched a spring. " He *wanted* to, naturally—and it was much the best thing he could do." She was in possession of the main case, as it truly seemed ; she had it all now. " He was capable of the effort, and he took the best way. Remember too what Maggie then seemed to us."

" She's very nice, but she always seems to me more than anything else the young woman who has a million a year. If you mean that that's what she especially seemed to him you of course place the thing in your light. The effort to forget Charlotte couldn't, I grant you, have been so difficult."

This pulled her up but for an instant. "I never said he didn't from the first—I never said that he doesn't more and more—like Maggie's money."

"I never said I shouldn't have liked it myself," Bob Assingham returned. He made no movement; he smoked another minute. "How much did Maggie know?"

"How much?" She seemed to consider—as if it were between quarts and gallons—how best to express the quantity. "She knew what Charlotte, in Florence, had told her."

"And what *had* Charlotte told her?"

"Very little."

"What makes you so sure?"

"Why this—that she *couldn't* tell her." And she explained a little what she meant. "There are things, my dear—haven't you felt it yourself, coarse as you are?—that no one could tell Maggie. There are things that, upon my word, I shouldn't care to attempt to tell her now."

The Colonel smoked on it. "She'd be so scandalised?"

"She'd be so frightened. She'd be, in her strange little way, so hurt. She wasn't born to know evil. She must never know it."

Bob Assingham had a queer grim laugh; the sound of which in fact fixed his wife before him. "We're taking grand ways to prevent it."

But she stood there to protest. "We're not taking any ways. The ways are all taken; they were taken from the moment he came up to our carriage that day in Villa Borghese—the second or third of her days in Rome, when, as you remember, you went off somewhere with Mr. Verver, and the Prince, who had got into the carriage with us, came home with us to tea. They had met; they had seen each other well; they were in relation: the rest was

to come of itself and as it could. It began, practically, I recollect, in our drive. Maggie happened to learn, by some other man's greeting of him, in the bright Roman way, from a street-corner as we passed, that one of the Prince's baptismal names, the one always used for him among his relations, was Amerigo: which—as you probably don't know, however, even after a lifetime of *me*—was the name, four hundred years ago, or whenever, of the pushing man who followed, across the sea, in the wake of Columbus and succeeded, where Columbus had failed, in becoming godfather, or name-father, to the new Continent; so that the thought of any connexion with him can even now thrill our artless breasts."

The Colonel's grim placidity could always quite adequately meet his wife's not infrequent imputation of ignorances, on the score of the land of her birth, unperturbed and unashamed; and these dark depths were even at the present moment not directly lighted by an inquiry that managed to be curious without being apologetic. "But where does the connexion come in?"

She had it ready. "By the women—that is by some obliging woman, of old, who was a descendant of the pushing man, the make-believe discoverer, and whom the Prince is therefore luckily able to refer to as an ancestress. A branch of the other family had become great—great enough, at least, to marry into his; and the name of the navigator, crowned with glory, was, very naturally, to become so the fashion among them that some son, of every generation, was appointed to wear it. My point is at any rate that I recall noticing at the time how the Prince was from the start helped with the dear Ververs by *his* wearing it. The connexion became romantic for Maggie the moment she took it in; she filled out, in a flash, every link that might be vague. 'By that sign,' I

quite said to myself, 'he'll conquer'—with his good fortune, of course, of having the other necessary signs too. It really," said Mrs. Assingham, "*was*, practically, the fine side of the wedge. Which struck me as also," she wound up, "a lovely note for the candour of the Ververs."

The Colonel had followed, but his comment was prosaic. "He knew, Amerigo, what he was about. And I don't mean the *old* one."

"I know what you mean!" his wife bravely threw off.

"The old one"—he pointed his effect—"isn't the only discoverer in the family."

"Oh as much as you like! If he discovered America—or got himself honoured as if he had—his successors were in due time to discover the Americans. And it was one of them in particular, doubtless, who was to discover how patriotic we are."

"Wouldn't this be the same one," the Colonel asked, "who really discovered what you call the connexion?"

She gave him a look. "The connexion's a true thing—the connexion's perfectly historic. Your insinuations recoil upon your cynical mind. Don't you understand," she asked, "that the history of such people is known, root and branch, at every moment of its course?"

"Oh it's all right," said Bob Assingham.

"Go to the British Museum," his companion continued with spirit.

"And what am I to do there?"

"There's a whole immense room, or recess, or department, or whatever, filled with books written about *his* family alone. You can see for yourself?"

"Have you seen for *your* self?"

She faltered but an instant. "Certainly—I went

one day with Maggie. We looked him up, so to say. They were most civil." And she fell again into the current her husband had slightly ruffled. "The effect was produced, the charm began to work at all events, in Rome, from that hour of the Prince's drive with us. My only course afterwards had to be to make the best of it. It was certainly good enough for that," Mrs. Assingham hastened to add, "and I didn't in the least see my duty in making the worst. In the same situation to-day I wouldn't act differently. I entered into the case as it then appeared to me—and as for the matter of that it still does. I *liked* it, I thought all sorts of good of it, and nothing can even now," she said with some intensity, "make me think anything else."

"Nothing can ever make you think anything you don't want to," the Colonel, still in his chair, remarked over his pipe. "You've got a precious power of thinking whatever you do want. You want also, from moment to moment, to think such desperately different things. What happened," he went on, "was that you fell violently in love with the Prince yourself, and that as you couldn't get *me* out of the way you had to take some roundabout course. *You* couldn't marry him, any more than Charlotte could—that is not to yourself. But you could to somebody else—it was always the Prince, it was always marriage. You could to your little friend, to whom there were no objections."

"Not only there were no objections, but there were reasons, positive ones—and all excellent, all charming." She spoke with an absence of all repudiation of his exposure of the spring of her conduct; and this abstention, clearly and effectively conscious, evidently cost her nothing. "It *is* always the Prince, and it *is* always, thank heaven, marriage. And these are the things, God grant, that it will always be.

That I could help, a year ago, most assuredly made me happy, and it continues to make me happy."

"Then why aren't you quiet?"

"I *am* quiet," said Fanny Assingham.

He looked at her, with his colourless candour, still in his place; she moved about again a little, emphasising by her unrest her declaration of her tranquillity. He was as silent at first as if he had taken her answer, but he wasn't to keep it long. "What do you make of it that, by your own show, Charlotte couldn't tell her all? What do you make of it that the Prince didn't tell her anything? Say one understands that there are things she can't be told—since, as you put it, she is so easily scared and shocked." He produced these objections slowly, giving her time, by his pauses, to stop roaming and come back to him. But she was roaming still when he concluded his inquiry. "If there hadn't been anything there shouldn't have been between the pair before Charlotte bolted—in order, precisely, as you say, that there *shouldn't* be: why in the world was what there *had* been too bad to be spoken of?"

Mrs. Assingham, after this question, continued still to circulate—not directly meeting it even when at last she stopped. "I thought you wanted me to be quiet."

"So I do—and I'm trying to make you so much so that you won't worry more. Can't you be quiet on *that*?"

She thought a moment—then seemed to try. "To relate that she had to 'bolt' for the reasons we speak of, even though the bolting had done for her what she wished—*that* I can perfectly feel Charlotte's not wanting to do."

"Ah then if it *has* done for her what she wished——!" But the Colonel's conclusion hung by the "if" which his wife didn't take up. So it hung but the longer when he presently spoke again. "All

one wonders, in that case, is why then she has come back to him."

"Say she hasn't come back to him. Not really to *him*."

"I'll say anything you like. But that won't do me the same good as your saying it."

"Nothing, my dear, will do you good," Mrs. Assingham returned. "You don't care for anything in itself; you care for nothing but to be grossly amused because I don't keep washing my hands——!"

"I thought your whole argument was that everything is so right that this is precisely what you do."

But his wife, as it was a point she had often made, could go on as she had gone on before. "You're perfectly indifferent, really; you're perfectly immoral. You've taken part in the sack of cities, and I'm sure you've done dreadful things yourself. But I *don't* trouble my head, if you like. 'So now there!'" she laughed.

He accepted her laugh, but he kept his way. "Well, I back poor Charlotte."

"'Back' her?"

"To know what she wants."

"Ah then, so do I. She does know what she wants." And Mrs. Assingham produced this quantity, at last, on the girl's behalf, as the ripe result of her late wanderings and musings. She had groped through their talk for the thread and now had got it. "She wants to be magnificent."

"She *is*," said the Colonel almost cynically.

"She wants"—his wife now had it fast—"to be thoroughly superior, and she's capable of that."

"Of wanting to?"

"Of carrying out her idea."

"And what *is* her idea?"

"To see Maggie through."

Bob Assingham wondered. "Through what?"

"Through everything. She *knows* the Prince. And Maggie doesn't. No, dear thing"—Mrs. Assingham had to recognise it—"she doesn't."

"So that Charlotte has come out to give her lessons?"

She continued, Fanny Assingham, to work out her thought. "She has done this great thing for him. That is a year ago she practically did it. She practically, at any rate, helped him to do it himself—and helped me to help him. She kept off, she stayed away, she left him free; and what, moreover, were her silences to Maggie but a direct aid to him? If she had spoken in Florence; if she had told her own poor story; if she had come back at any time—till within a few weeks ago; if she hadn't gone to New York and hadn't held out there: if she hadn't done these things all that has happened since would certainly have been different. Therefore she's in a position to be consistent now. She knows the Prince," Mrs. Assingham repeated. It involved even again her former recognition. "And Maggie, dear thing, doesn't."

She was high, she was lucid, she was almost inspired; and it was but the deeper drop therefore to her husband's flat common sense. "In other words Maggie is, by her ignorance, in danger? Then if she's in danger, there *is* danger."

"There *won't* be—with Charlotte's understanding of it. That's where she has had her conception of being able to be heroic, of being able in fact to be sublime. She *is*, she will be"—the good lady by this time glowed. "So she sees it—to become, for her best friend, an element of *positive* safety."

Bob Assingham looked at it hard. "Which of them do you call her best friend?"

She gave a toss of impatience. "I'll leave you to discover!" But the grand truth thus made out she

had now completely adopted. "It's for *us* therefore to be hers."

"'Hers'?"

"You and I. It's for us to be Charlotte's. It's for us on our side to see *her* through."

"Through her sublimity?"

"Through her noble lonely life. Only—that's essential—it musn't *be* lonely. It will be all right if she marries."

"So we're to marry her?"

"We're to marry her. It will be," Mrs. Assingham continued, "the great thing I can do." She made it out more and more. "It will make up."

"Make up for what?" As she said nothing, however, his desire for lucidity renewed itself. "If everything's so all right what is there to make up for?"

"Why if I did do either of them by any chance a wrong. If I made a mistake."

"You'll make up for it by making another?" And then as she again took her time: "I thought your whole point is just that you're sure."

"One can never be ideally sure of anything. There are always possibilities."

"Then if we can but strike so wild why keep meddling?"

It made her again look at him. "Where would you have been, my dear, if I hadn't meddled with *you*?"

"Ah that wasn't meddling—I was your own. I was your own," said the Colonel, "from the moment I didn't object."

"Well, these people won't object. *They* are my own too—in the sense that I'm awfully fond of them. Also in the sense," she continued, "that I think they're not so very much less fond of me. Our relation, all round, exists—it's a reality, and a very

good one ; we're mixed up, so to speak, and it's too late to change it. We must live *in* it and with it. Therefore to see that Charlotte gets a good husband as soon as possible—that, as I say, will be one of my ways of living. It will cover," she said with conviction, " all the ground." And then as his own conviction appeared to continue as little to match : " The ground, I mean, of any nervousness I may ever feel. It will be in fact my duty—and I shan't rest till my duty's performed." She had arrived by this time at something like exaltation. " I shall give, for the next year or two if necessary, my life to it. I shall have done in that case what I can."

He took it at last as it came. " You hold there's no limit to what you ' can ' ? "

" I don't say there's no limit, or anything of the sort. I say there are good chances—enough of them for hope. Why shouldn't there be when a girl is after all what she is ? "

" By after ' all ' you mean after she's in love with somebody else ? "

The Colonel put his question with a quietude doubtless designed to be fatal ; but it scarcely pulled her up. " She's not too much in love not herself to want to marry. She would now particularly like to."

" Has she told you so ? "

" Not yet. It's too soon. But she will. Meanwhile however I don't require the information. Her marrying will prove the truth."

" And what truth ? "

" The truth of everything I say."

" Prove it to whom ? "

" Well, to myself, to begin with. That will be enough for me — to work for her. What it will prove," Mrs. Assingham presently went on, " will be that she's cured. That she accepts the situation."

He paid this the tribute of a long pull at his pipe.

"The situation of doing the one thing she can that will really seem to cover her tracks?"

His wife looked at him, the good dry man, as if now at last he was merely vulgar. "The one thing she can do that will really make new tracks altogether. The thing that, before any other, will be wise and right. The thing that will best give her the chance to be magnificent."

He slowly emitted his smoke. "And best give you, by the same token, yours to be magnificent with her?"

"I shall be as magnificent at least as I can."

Bob Assingham got up. "And you call *me* immoral?"

It made her hesitate a moment. "I'll call you stupid if you prefer. But stupidity pushed to a certain point *is*, you know, immorality. Just so what is morality but high intelligence?" This he was unable to tell her; which left her more definitely to conclude. "Besides, it's all, at the worst, great fun."

"Oh if you simply put it at *that*——!"

His implication was that in this case they had a common ground; yet even thus he couldn't catch her by it. "Oh I don't mean," she said from the threshold, "the fun that you mean. Good-night." In answer to which, as he turned out the electric light, he gave an odd short groan, almost a grunt. He *had* apparently meant some particular kind.

V

"Well, now I must tell you, for I want to be absolutely honest." So Charlotte spoke, a little ominously, after they had got into the Park. "I don't want to pretend, and I can't pretend a moment longer. You may think of me what you will, but I don't care. I knew I shouldn't and I find now how little. I came back for this. Not really for anything else. For this," she repeated as under the influence of her tone the Prince had already come to a pause.

"For 'this'?" He spoke as if the particular thing she indicated were vague to him—or were, rather, a quantity that couldn't at the most be much.

It would be as much however as she should be able to make it. "To have one hour alone with you."

It had rained heavily in the night, and though the pavements were now dry, thanks to a cleansing breeze, the August morning, with its hovering thick-drifting clouds and freshened air, was cool and grey. The multitudinous green of the Park had been deepened, and a wholesome smell of irrigation, purging the place of dust and of odours less acceptable, rose from the earth. Charlotte had looked about her with expression from the first of their coming in, quite as if for a deep greeting, for general recognition: the day was, even in the heart of London, of a rich low-browed weather-washed English type. It was as if it had been waiting for her, as if she knew

it, placed it, loved it, as if it were in fact a part of what she had come back for. So far as this was the case the impression of course could only be lost on a mere vague Italian ; it was one of those for which you had to be blessedly an American—as indeed you had to be blessedly an American for all sorts of things : so long as you hadn't, blessedly or not, to remain in America. The Prince had by half-past ten—as also by definite appointment—called in Cadogan Place for Mrs. Assingham's visitor, and then after brief delay the two had walked together up Sloane Street and got straight into the Park from Knightsbridge. The understanding to this end had taken its place, after a couple of days, as inevitably consequent on the appeal made by the girl during those first moments in Mrs. Assingham's drawing-room. It was an appeal the couple of days had done nothing to invalidate—everything much rather to place in a light, and as to which it obviously wouldn't have fitted that any one should raise an objection. Who was there for that matter to raise one from the moment Mrs. Assingham, informed and apparently not disapproving, didn't intervene ? This the young man had asked himself—with a very sufficient sense of what would have made *him* ridiculous. He wasn't going to begin—that at least was certain—by showing a fear. Even had fear at first been sharp in him, moreover, it would already, not a little, have dropped ; so happy, all round, so propitious, he quite might have called it, had been the effect of this rapid interval.

The time had been taken up largely by his active reception of his own wedding-guests and by Maggie's scarce less absorbed entertainment of her friend, whom she had kept for hours together in Portland Place ; whom she hadn't, as wouldn't have been convenient, invited altogether as yet to migrate, but who had been present with other persons, *his* contingent,

at luncheon, at tea, at dinner, at perpetual repasts—he had never in his life, it struck him, had to reckon with so much eating—whenever he had looked in. If he hadn't again till this hour, save for a minute, seen Charlotte alone, so, positively, all the while, he hadn't seen even Maggie; and if therefore he hadn't seen even Maggie nothing was more natural than that he shouldn't have seen Charlotte. The exceptional minute, a mere snatch, at the tail of the others, on the huge Portland Place staircase, had sufficiently enabled the girl to remind him—so ready she assumed him to be—of what they were to do. Time pressed if they were to do it at all. Every one had brought gifts; his relations had brought wonders — how did they still have, where did they still find, such treasures? She only had brought nothing, and she was ashamed; yet even by the sight of the rest of the tribute she wouldn't be put off. She would do what she could, and he was, unknown to Maggie, he must remember, to give her his aid. He had prolonged the minute so far as to take time to hesitate for a reason, and then to risk bringing his reason out. The risk was because he might hurt her—hurt her pride, if she had that particular sort. But she might as well be hurt one way as another; and, besides, that particular sort of pride was just what she hadn't. So his slight resistance while they lingered had been just easy enough not to be impossible.

"I hate to encourage you—and for such a purpose, after all—to spend your money."

She had stood a stair or two below him; where, while she looked up at him beneath the high domed light of the hall, she rubbed with her palm the polished mahogany of the balustrade, which was mounted on fine ironwork, eighteenth-century English. "Because you think I must have so little? I've enough, at any rate—enough for us to take our hour. Enough,"

she had smiled, "is as good as a feast! And then," she had said, "it isn't of course a question of anything expensive, gorged with treasure as Maggie is; it isn't a question of competing or outshining. What, naturally, in the way of the priceless, *hasn't* she got? Mine is to be the offering of the poor —something precisely that no rich person *could* ever give her, and that, being herself too rich ever to buy it, she would therefore never have." Charlotte had spoken as if after so much thought. "Only as it can't be fine it ought to be funny—and that's the sort of thing to hunt for. Hunting in London, besides, is amusing in itself."

He recalled even how he had been struck with her word. "'Funny'?"

"Oh I don't mean a comic toy—I mean some little thing with a charm. But absolutely *right*, in its comparative cheapness. That's what I call funny," she had explained. "You used," she had also added, "to help me to get things cheap in Rome. You were splendid for beating down. I have them all still, I needn't say—the little bargains I there owed you. There are bargains in London in August."

"Ah but I don't understand your English buying, and I confess I find it dull." So much as that, while they turned to go up together, he had objected. "I understood my poor dear Romans."

"It was they who understood you—that was your pull," she had laughed. "Our amusement here is just that they don't understand us. We can make it amusing. You'll see."

If he had hesitated again it was because the point permitted. "The amusement surely will be to find our present."

"Certainly—as I say."

"Well, if they don't come down——?"

"Then we'll come up. There's always something

to be done. Besides, Prince," she had gone on, " I'm not, if you come to that, absolutely a pauper. I'm too poor for some things," she had said—yet, strange as she was, lightly enough ; " but I'm not too poor for others." And she had paused again at the top. " I've been saving up."

He had really challenged it. " In America ? "

" Yes, even there—with my motive. And we oughtn't, you know," she had wound up, " to leave it beyond to-morrow."

That, definitely, with ten words more, was what had passed—he feeling all the while how any sort of begging-off would only magnify it. He might get on with things as they were, but he must do anything rather than magnify. Beyond which it was pitiful to make her beg of him. He *was* making her—she had begged ; and this, for a special sensibility in him, didn't at all do. That was accordingly in fine how they had come to where they were : he was engaged as hard as possible in the policy of not magnifying. He had kept this up even on her making the point, and as if it were almost the whole point, that Maggie of course wasn't to have an idea. Half the interest of the thing at least would be that she shouldn't suspect ; therefore he was completely to keep it from her—as Charlotte on her side would—that they had been anywhere at all together or had so much as seen each other for five minutes alone. The absolute secrecy of their little excursion was in short of the essence ; she appealed to his kindness to let her feel that he didn't betray her. There had been something, frankly, a little disconcerting in such an appeal at such an hour, on the very eve of his nuptials : it was one thing to have met the girl casually at Mrs Assingham's and another to arrange with her thus for a morning practically as private as their old mornings in Rome and practically not less intimate. He had

immediately told Maggie, the same evening, of the minutes that had passed between them in Cadogan Place—though not mentioning those of Mrs. Assingham's absence any more than he mentioned the fact of what their friend had then, with such small delay, proposed. But what had briefly checked his assent to any present, to any positive making of mystery—what had made him, while they stood at the top of the stairs, demur just long enough for her to notice it—was the sense of the resemblance of the little plan before him to occasions, of the past, from which he was quite disconnected, from which he could only desire to be. This was like beginning something over, which was the last thing he wanted. The strength, the beauty of his actual position was in its being wholly a fresh start, was that what it began would be new altogether. These items of his consciousness had clustered so quickly that by the time Charlotte read them in his face he was in presence of what they amounted to. She had challenged them as soon as read them, had met them with a "Do you want then to go and tell her?" that had somehow made them ridiculous. It had made him promptly fall back on minimising it—that is on minimising "fuss." Apparent scruples were obviously fuss, and he had on the spot clutched, in the light of this truth, at the happy principle that would meet every case.

This principle was simply to be, with the girl, always simple—and with the very last simplicity. That would cover everything. It had covered then and there certainly his immediate submission to the sight of what was clearest. This was really that what she asked was little compared to what she gave. What she gave touched him, as she faced him, for it was the full tune of her renouncing. She really renounced—renounced everything, and without even insisting now on what it had all been for her. Her

only insistence was her insistence on the small matter of their keeping their appointment to themselves. That, in exchange for "everything," everything she gave up, *was* verily but a trifle. He let himself accordingly be guided; he so soon assented, for enlightened indulgence, to any particular turn she might wish the occasion to take, that the stamp of her preference had been well applied to it even while they were still in the Park. The application in fact presently required that they should sit down a little, really to see where they were; in obedience to which propriety they had some ten minutes, of a quality quite distinct, in a couple of penny-chairs under one of the larger trees. They had taken, for their walk, to the cropped rain-freshened grass, after finding it already dry; and the chairs, turned away from the broad alley, the main drive and the aspect of Park Lane, looked across the wide reaches of green which seemed in a manner to refine upon their freedom. They helped Charlotte thus to make her position—her temporary position—still more clear, and it for this purpose could have been but that, abruptly, on seeing her opportunity, she sat down. He stood for a little before her as if to mark the importance of not wasting time, the importance she herself had previously insisted on; but after she had said a few words it was impossible for him not to resort again to good nature. He marked as he could, by this concession, that if he had finally met her first proposal for what would be "amusing" in it, so any idea she might have would contribute to that effect. He had as a consequence—in all consistency—to take it for amusing that she reaffirmed, and reaffirmed again, the truth that was *her* truth.

"I don't care what you make of it, and I don't ask anything whatever of you—anything but this. I want to have said it—that's all; I want not to have

failed to say it. To see you once and be with you, to be as we are now and as we used to be, for one small hour — or say for two — that's what I've had for weeks in my head. I mean, of course, to get it *before*— before what you're going to do. So, all the while, you see," she went on with her eyes on him, "it was a question for me if I should be able to manage it in time. If I couldn't have come now I probably shouldn't have come at all—perhaps even ever. Now that I'm here I shall stay, but there were moments over there when I despaired. It wasn't easy—there were reasons; but it was either this or nothing. So I didn't struggle, you see, in vain. *After*—oh I didn't want that! I don't mean," she smiled, "that it wouldn't have been delightful to see you even then — to see you at any time; but I would never have come for it. This is different. This is what I wanted. This is what I've got. This is what I shall always have. This is what I should have missed, of course," she pursued, "if you had chosen to make me miss it. If you had thought me horrid, had refused to come, I should, naturally, have been immensely 'sold.' I had to take the risk. Well, you're all I could have hoped. That's what I was to have said. I didn't want simply to get my time with you, but I wanted you to know. I wanted you "—she kept it up, slowly, softly, with a small tremor of voice but without the least failure of sense or sequence—"I wanted you to understand. I wanted you, that is, to hear. I don't care, I think, whether you understand or not. If I ask nothing of you I don't—I mayn't—ask even so much as that. What you may think of me—that doesn't in the least matter. What I want is that it shall always be with you—so that you'll never be able quite to get rid of it—that I *did*. I won't say that *you* did—you may make as little of that as you like. But that I was here with you where we are

and *as* we are—I just saying this. Giving myself, in other words, away—and perfectly willing to do it for nothing. That's all."

She paused as if her demonstration was complete—yet for the moment without moving ; as if in fact to give it a few minutes to sink in ; into the listening air, into the watching space, into the conscious hospitality of nature, so far as nature was, all Londonised, all vulgarised, with them there ; or even for that matter into her own open ears rather than into the attention of her passive and prudent friend. His attention had done all that attention could do ; his handsome slightly anxious, yet still more definitely " amused " face sufficiently played its part. He clutched, however, at what he could best clutch at—the fact that she let him off, definitely let him off. She let him off, it seemed, even from so much as answering ; so that while he smiled back at her in return for her information he felt his lips remain closed to the successive vaguenesses of rejoinder, of objection, that rose for him from within. Charlotte herself spoke again at last—" You may want to know what I get by it. But that's my own affair." He really didn't want to know even this—or continued, for the safest plan, quite to behave as if he didn't ; which prolonged the mere dumbness of diversion in which he had taken refuge. He was glad when finally—the point she had wished to make seeming established to her satisfaction—they brought to what might pass for a close the moment of his life at which he had had least to say. Movement and progress, after this, with more impersonal talk, were naturally a relief ; so that he wasn't again during their excursion at a loss for the right word. The air had been, as it were, cleared ; they had their errand itself to discuss, and the opportunities of London, the sense of the wonderful place, the pleasures of prowling there, the question of

shops, of possibilities, of particular objects, noticed by each in previous prowls. Each professed surprise at the extent of the other's knowledge; the Prince in especial wondered at his friend's possession of her London. He had rather prized his own possession, the guidance he could really often give a cabman; it was a whim of his own, a part of his Anglomania and congruous with that feature, which had after all so much more surface than depth. When his companion, with the memory of other visits and other rambles, spoke of places he hadn't seen and things he didn't know, he actually felt again—as half the effect—just a shade humiliated. He might even have felt a trifle annoyed—if it hadn't been, on this spot, for his being even more interested. It was a fresh light on Charlotte and on her curious world-quality, of which in Rome he had had his due sense, but which clearly would show larger on the big London stage. Rome was in comparison a village, a family-party, a little old-world spinnet for the fingers of one hand. By the time they reached the Marble Arch it was almost as if she were showing him a new side, and that in fact gave amusement a new and a firmer basis. The right tone would be easy for putting himself in her hands. Should they disagree a little—frankly and fairly—about directions and chances, values and authenticities, the situation would be quite gloriously saved. They were none the less, as happened, much of one mind on the article of their keeping clear of resorts with which Maggie would be acquainted. Charlotte recalled it as a matter of course, named it in time as a condition—they would keep away from any place to which he had already been with Maggie.

This made indeed a scant difference, for though he had during the last month done few things so much as attend his future wife on her making of purchases, the *antiquarii*, as he called them with Charlotte, hadn't

been the great affair. Except in Bond Street, really, Maggie had had no use for them: her situation indeed in connexion with that order of traffic was full of consequences produced by her father's. Mr. Verver, one of the great collectors of the world, hadn't left his daughter to prowl for herself; he had little to do with shops and was mostly, as a purchaser, approached privately and from afar. Great people, all over Europe, sought introductions to him; high personages, incredibly high, and more of them than would ever be known, solemnly sworn as every one was, in such cases, to discretion, high personages made up to him as the one man on the short authentic list likely to give the price. It had therefore been easy to settle, as they walked, that the tracks of the Ververs, daughter's as well as father's, were to be avoided; the importance only was that their talk about it led for a moment to the first words they had as yet exchanged on the subject of Maggie. Charlotte, still in the Park, proceeded to them—for it was she who began—with a serenity of appreciation that was odd, certainly, as a sequel to her words of ten minutes before. This was another note on her—what he would have called another light—to her companion, who, though without giving a sign, admired, for what it was, the simplicity of her transition, a transition that took no trouble either to trace or to explain itself. She paused again an instant on the grass to make it; she stopped before him with a sudden "Anything of course, dear as she is, *will* do for her. I mean if I were to give her a pin-cushion from the Baker-Street Bazaar."

"That's exactly what *I* mean"—the Prince laughed out this allusion to their snatch of talk in Portland Place. "It's just what I suggested."

She took, however, no notice of the reminder; she went on in her own way. "But it isn't a reason. In

that case one would never do anything for her. I mean," Charlotte explained, " if one took advantage of her character."

" Of her character ? "

" We mustn't take advantage of her character," the girl, again unheeding, pursued. " One mustn't, if not for *her*, at least for one's self. She saves one such trouble."

She had spoken thoughtfully, her eyes on her friend's ; she might have been talking, preoccupied and practical, of some one with whom he was comparatively unconnected. " She certainly *gives* one no trouble," said the Prince. And then as if this were perhaps ambiguous or inadequate : " She's not selfish —God forgive her !—enough."

" That's what I mean," Charlotte instantly said. " She's not selfish enough. There's nothing, absolutely, that one *need* do for her. She's so modest," she developed—" she doesn't miss things. I mean if you love her—or rather, I should say, if she loves you. She lets it go."

The Prince frowned a little—as a tribute after all to seriousness. " She lets what——? "

"Anything—anything that you might do and that you don't. She lets everything go but her own disposition to be kind to you. It's of herself that she asks efforts—so far as she ever *has* to ask them. She hasn't, much. She does everything herself. And that's terrible."

The Prince had listened ; but, always with propriety, didn't commit himself. " Terrible ? "

" Well, unless one's almost as good as she. It makes too easy terms for one. It takes stuff within one, so far as one's decency is concerned, to stand it. And nobody," Charlotte continued in the same manner, " is decent enough, good enough, to stand it—not without help from religion or something of

that kind. Not without prayer and fasting—that is without taking great care. Certainly," she said, " such people as you and I are not."

The Prince, obligingly, thought an instant. " Not good enough to stand it ? "

" Well, not good enough not rather to feel the strain. We happen each, I think, to be of the kind that are easily spoiled."

Her friend again, for propriety, followed the argument. " Oh I don't know. May not one's affection for her do something more for one's decency, as you call it, than her own generosity—her own affection, *her* ' decency '—has the unfortunate virtue to undo ? "

" Ah of course it must be all in that."

But she had made her question, all the same, interesting to him. " What it comes to—one can see what you mean—is the way she believes in one. That is if she believes at all."

" Yes, that's what it comes to," said Charlotte Stant.

" And why," he asked almost soothingly, " should it be terrible ? " He couldn't at the worst see that.

" Because it's always so—the idea of having to pity people."

" Not when there's also with it the idea of helping them."

" Yes, but if we can't help them ? "

" We *can*—we always can. That is," he competently added, " if we care for them. And that's what we're talking about."

" Yes "—she on the whole assented. " It comes back then to our absolutely refusing to be spoiled."

" Certainly. But everything," the Prince laughed as they went on—" all your ' decency,' I mean—comes back to that."

She walked beside him a moment. " It's just what *I* meant," she then reasonably said.

VI

The man in the little shop in which, well after this, they lingered longest, the small but interesting dealer in the Bloomsbury street who was remarkable for an insistence not importunate, inasmuch as it was mainly mute, but singularly, intensely coercive—this personage fixed on his visitors an extraordinary pair of eyes and looked from one to the other while they considered the object with which he appeared mainly to hope to tempt them. They had come to him last, for their time was nearly up ; an hour of it at least, from the moment of their getting into a hansom at the Marble Arch, having yielded no better result than the amusement invoked from the first. The amusement of course was to have consisted in seeking, but it had also involved the idea of finding ; which latter necessity would have been obtrusive only if they had found too soon. The question at present was if they *were* finding, and they put it to each other, in the Bloomsbury shop, while they enjoyed the undiverted attention of the shopman. He was clearly the master and devoted to his business—the essence of which, in his conception, might precisely have been this particular secret that he possessed for worrying the customer so little that it fairly threw over their relation a sort of solemnity. He hadn't many things, none of the redundancy of " rot " they had elsewhere seen, and our friends had, on entering, even had the

sense of a muster so scant that, as high values obviously wouldn't reign, the effect might be almost pitiful. Then their impression had changed ; for, though the show was of small pieces, several taken from the little window and others extracted from a cupboard behind the counter—dusky, in the rather low-browed place, despite its glass doors—each bid for their attention spoke, however modestly, for itself, and the pitch of their entertainer's pretensions was promptly enough given. His array was heterogeneous and not at all imposing ; still it differed agreeably from what they had hitherto seen.

Charlotte, after the incident, was to be full of impressions, of several of which, later on, she gave her companion—always in the interest of their amusement —the benefit ; and one of the impressions had been that the man himself was the greatest curiosity they had looked at. The Prince was to reply to this that he himself hadn't looked at him ; as, precisely, in the general connexion, Charlotte had more than once, from other days, noted, for his advantage, her consciousness of how, below a certain social plane, he never *saw*. One kind of shopman was just like another to him—which was oddly inconsequent on the part of a mind that where it did notice noticed so much. He took throughout always the meaner sort for granted—the night of their meanness, or whatever name one might give it for him, made all his cats grey. He didn't, no doubt, want to hurt them, but he imaged them no more than if his eyes acted only for the level of his own high head. Her own vision acted for every relation—this he had seen for himself : she remarked beggars, she remembered servants, she recognised cabmen ; she had often distinguished beauty, when out with him, in dirty children ; she had admired " type " in faces at hucksters' stalls. Therefore she had on this occasion found their *antiquario*

interesting ; partly because he cared so for his things, and partly because he cared—well, so for *them.* " He likes his things—he loves them," she was to say ; " and it isn't only—it isn't perhaps even at all—that he loves to sell them. I think he would love to keep them if he could ; and he prefers at any rate to sell them to right people. We, clearly, were right people—he knows them when he sees them ; and that's why, as I say, you could make out, or at least I could, that he cared for us. Didn't you see "—she was to ask it with an insistence—" the way he looked at us and took us in ? I doubt if either of us have ever been so well looked at before. Yes, he'll remember us "—she was to profess herself convinced of *that* almost to uneasiness. " But it was after all "—this was perhaps reassuring—" because, given his taste, since he *has* taste, he was pleased with us, he was struck—he had ideas about us. Well, I should think people might ; we're beautiful—aren't we ?—and he knows. Then also he has his way ; for that way of saying nothing with his lips when he's all the while pressing you so with his face, which shows how he knows you feel it—that *is* a regular way."

Of decent old gold, old silver, old bronze, of old chased and jewelled artistry, were the objects that, successively produced, had ended by numerously dotting the counter where the shopman's slim light fingers, with neat nails, touched them at moments, briefly, nervously, tenderly, as those of a chess-player rest, a few seconds, over the board, on a figure he thinks he may move and then may not : small florid ancientries, ornaments, pendants, lockets, brooches, buckles, pretexts for dim brilliants, bloodless rubies, pearls either too large or too opaque for value ; miniatures mounted with diamonds that had ceased to dazzle ; snuff-boxes presented to — or by — the

too-questionable great; cups, trays, taper-stands, suggestive of pawn-tickets, archaic and brown, that would themselves, if preserved, have been prized curiosities. A few commemorative medals of neat outline but dull reference; a classic monument or two, things of the first years of the century; things consular, Napoleonic, temples, obelisks, arches, tinily re-embodied, completed the discreet cluster; in which, however, even after tentative re-enforcement from several quaint rings, intaglios, amethysts, carbuncles, each of which had found a home in the ancient sallow satin of some weakly-snapping little box, there was, in spite of the due proportion of faint poetry, no great force of persuasion. They looked, the visitors, they touched, they vaguely pretended to consider, but with scepticism, so far as courtesy permitted, in the quality of their attention. It was impossible they shouldn't, after a little, tacitly agree as to the absurdity of carrying to Maggie a token from such a stock. It would be—that was the difficulty—pretentious without being "good"; too usual, as a treasure, to have been an inspiration of the giver, and yet too primitive to be taken as tribute welcome on any terms. They had been out more than two hours and evidently had found nothing. It forced from Charlotte a rueful admission.

"It ought, really, if it should be a thing of this sort, to take its little value from having belonged to one's self."

"Ecco!" said the Prince — just triumphantly enough. "There you are."

Behind the dealer were sundry small cupboards in the wall. Two or three of these Charlotte had seen him open, so that her eyes found themselves resting on those he hadn't visited. But she granted the whole mistake. "There's nothing here she could wear."

It was only after a moment that her companion rejoined : " Is there anything—do you think—that you could ? "

It made her just start. She didn't at all events look at the objects ; she but looked for an instant very directly at him. " No."

" Ah ! " the Prince quietly exclaimed.

" Would it be," Charlotte asked, " your idea to offer me something ? "

" Well, why not—as a small ricordo ? "

" But a ricordo of what ? "

" Why of ' this '—as you yourself say. Of this little hunt."

" Oh I say it—but hasn't my whole point been that I don't ask you to. Therefore," she demanded —but smiling at him now—" where's the logic ? "

" Oh the logic——! " he laughed.

" But logic's everything. That at least is how I feel it. A ricordo from you—from you to me—is a ricordo of nothing. It has no reference."

" Ah my dear ! " he vaguely protested. Their entertainer meanwhile stood there with his eyes on them, and the girl, though at this minute more interested in her passage with her friend than in anything else, again met his gaze. It was a comfort to her that their foreign tongue covered what they said—and they might have appeared of course, as the Prince now had one of the snuff-boxes in his hand, to be discussing a purchase.

" You don't refer," she went on to her companion. " *I* refer."

He had lifted the lid of his little box and he looked into it hard. " Do you mean by that then that you would be free——? "

" ' Free '——? "

" To offer me something ? "

This gave her a longer pause, and when she spoke

again she might have seemed, oddly, to be addressing the dealer. "Would you allow me——?"

"No," said the Prince into his little box.

"You wouldn't accept it from me?"

"No," he repeated in the same way.

She exhaled a long breath that was like a guarded sigh. "But you've touched an idea that *has* been mine. It's what I've wanted." Then she added: "It was what I hoped."

He put down his box—this had drawn his eyes. He made nothing, clearly, of the little man's attention. "It's what you brought me out for?"

"Well, that's at any rate," she returned, "my own affair. But it won't do?"

"It won't do, cara mia."

"It's impossible?"

"It's impossible." And he took up one of the brooches.

She had another pause, while the shopman only waited. "If I were to accept from you one of these charming little ornaments as you suggest, what should I do with it?"

He was perhaps at last a little irritated; he even —as if *he* might understand—looked vaguely across at their host. "Wear it, per Bacco!"

"Where then, please? Under my clothes?"

"Wherever you like. But it isn't then, if you will," he added, "worth talking about."

"It's only worth talking about, mio caro," she smiled, "from your having begun it. My question is only reasonable—so that your idea may stand or fall by your answer to it. If I should pin one of these things on for you would it be, to your mind, that I might go home and show it to Maggie as your present?"

They had had between them often in talk the refrain, jocosely, descriptively applied, of "old-

Roman." It had been, as a pleasantry, in the other time, his explanation to her of everything; but nothing truly had even seemed so old-Roman as the shrug in which he now indulged. "Why in the world not?"

"Because—on our basis—it would be impossible to give her an account of the pretext."

"The pretext——?" He wondered.

"The occasion. This ramble which we shall have had together and that we're not to speak of."

"Oh yes," he said after a moment—"I remember we're not to speak of it."

"That of course you're pledged to. And the one thing, you see, goes with the other. So you don't insist."

He had again, at random, laid back his trinket; with which he quite turned to her a little wearily at last—even a little impatiently. "I don't insist."

It disposed for the time of the question, but what was next apparent was that it had seen them no further. The shopman, who hadn't stirred, stood there in his patience—which, his mute intensity helping, had almost the effect of an ironic comment. The Prince moved to the glass door and, his back to the others, as with nothing more to contribute, looked—though not less patiently—into the street. Then the shopman, for Charlotte, momentously broke silence. "You've seen, disgraziatamente, signora principessa," he sadly said, "too much"—and it made the Prince face about. For the effect of the momentous came, if not from the sense, from the sound of his words; which was that of the suddenest sharpest Italian. Charlotte exchanged with her friend a glance that matched it, and just for the minute they were held in check. But their glance had after all by that time said more than one thing; had both exclaimed on the apprehension, by the

wretch, of their intimate conversation, let alone of her possible, her impossible, title, and remarked, for mutual reassurance, that it didn't, all the same, matter. The Prince remained by the door, but immediately addressing the speaker from where he stood.

"You're Italian then, are you?"

But the reply came in English. "Oh dear no."

"You're English?"

To which the answer was this time, with a smile, in briefest Italian. "Che!" The dealer waived the question—he practically disposed of it by turning straightway toward a receptacle to which he hadn't yet resorted and from which, after unlocking it, he extracted a square box, of some twenty inches in height, covered with worn-looking leather. He placed the box on the counter, pushed back a pair of small hooks, lifted the lid and removed from its nest a drinking-vessel larger than a common cup, yet not of exorbitant size, and formed, to appearance, either of old fine gold or of some material once richly gilt. He handled it with tenderness, with ceremony, making a place for it on a small satin mat. "My Golden Bowl," he observed—and it sounded on his lips as if it said everything. He left the important object—for as "important" it did somehow present itself—to produce its certain effect. Simple but singularly elegant, it stood on a circular foot, a short pedestal with a slightly spreading base, and, though not of signal depth, justified its title by the charm of its shape as well as by the tone of its surface. It might have been a large goblet diminished, to the enhancement of its happy curve, by half its original height. As formed of solid gold it was impressive; it seemed indeed to warn off the prudent admirer. Charlotte, with care, immediately took it up, while the Prince, who had after a minute shifted his position again, regarded it from a distance.

It was heavier than Charlotte had thought. "Gold, really gold?" she asked of their companion.

He waited. Look a little, and perhaps you'll make out."

She looked, holding it up in both her fine hands, turning it to the light. "It may be cheap for what it is, but it will be dear, I'm afraid, for me."

"Well," said the man, "I can part with it for less than its value. I got it, you see, for less."

"For how much then?"

Again he waited, always with his serene stare. "Do you like it then?"

Charlotte turned to her friend. "Do *you* like it?"

He came no nearer; he looked at their entertainer. "Cos'è?"

"Well, signori miei, if you must know, it's just a perfect crystal."

"Of course we must know, per Dio!" said the Prince. But he turned away again—he went back to his glass door.

Charlotte set down the bowl; she was evidently taken. "Do you mean it's cut out of a single crystal?"

"If it isn't I think I can promise you that you'll never find any joint or any piecing."

She wondered. "Even if I were to scrape off the gold?"

He showed, though with due respect, that she amused him. "You couldn't scrape it off—it has been too well put on; put on I don't know when and I don't know how. But by some very fine old worker and by some beautiful old process."

Charlotte, frankly charmed with the cup, smiled back at him now. "A lost art?"

"Call it a lost art."

"But of what time then is the whole thing?"

"Well, say also of a lost time."

The girl considered. "Then if it's so precious how comes it to be cheap?"

The dealer once more hung fire, but by this time the Prince had lost patience. "I'll wait for you out in the air," he said to his companion, and though he spoke without irritation he pointed his remark by passing immediately into the street, where during the next minutes the others saw him, his back to the shop window, philosophically enough hover and light a fresh cigarette. Charlotte even took a little her time; she was aware of his funny Italian taste for London street-life.

Her host meanwhile at any rate answered her question. "Ah I've had it a long time without selling it. I think I must have been keeping it, madam, for you."

"You've kept it for me because you've thought I mightn't see what's the matter with it?"

He only continued to face her—he only continued to appear to follow the play of her mind. "What *is* the matter with it?"

"Oh it's not for me to say; it's for you honestly to tell me. Of course I know something must be."

"But if it's something you can't find out isn't that as good as if it were nothing?"

"I probably *should* find out as soon as I had paid for it."

"Not," her host lucidly insisted, "if you hadn't paid too much."

"What do you call," she asked, "little enough?"

"Well, what should you say to fifteen pounds?"

"I should say," said Charlotte with the utmost promptitude, "that it's altogether too much."

The dealer shook his head slowly and sadly, but firmly. "It's my price, madam—and if you admire

the thing I think it really might be yours. It's not too much. It's too little. It's almost nothing. I can't go lower."

Charlotte, wondering but resisting, bent over the bowl again. "Then it's impossible. It's more than I can afford."

"Ah," the man returned, "one can sometimes afford for a present more than one can afford for one's self."

He said it so coaxingly that she found herself going on without, as might be said, putting him in his place. "Oh of course it would be only for a present——!"

"Then it would be a lovely one."

"Does one make a present," she asked, "of an object that contains to one's knowledge a flaw?"

"Well, if one knows of it one has only to mention it. The good faith," the man smiled, "is always there."

"And leave the person to whom one gives the thing, you mean, to discover it?"

"He wouldn't discover it—if you're speaking of a gentleman."

"I'm not speaking of any one in particular," Charlotte said.

"Well, whoever it might be. He might know—and he might try. But he wouldn't find."

She kept her eyes on him as if, though unsatisfied, mystified, she yet had a fancy for the bowl. "Not even if the thing should come to pieces?" And then as he was silent: "Not even if he should have to say to me, 'The Golden Bowl is broken'?"

He was still silent; after which he had his strangest smile. "Ah if any one should *want* to smash it——!"

She laughed; she almost admired the little man's

expression. "You mean one could smash it with a hammer?"

"Yes, if nothing else would do. Or perhaps even by dashing it with violence—say upon a marble floor."

"Oh marble floors——!" But she might have been thinking—for they were a connexion, marble floors; a connexion with many things: with her old Rome, and with *his*; with the palaces of his past and, a little, of hers; with the possibilities of his future, with the sumptuosities of his marriage, with the wealth of the Ververs. All the same, however, there were other things; and they all together held for a moment her fancy. "Does crystal then break—when it *is* crystal? I thought its beauty was its hardness."

Her friend, in his way, discriminated. "Its beauty is its *being* crystal. But its hardness is certainly its safety. It doesn't break," he went on, "like vile glass. It splits—if there is a split."

"Ah!"—Charlotte breathed with interest. "If there *is* a split." And she looked down again at the bowl. "There *is* a split, eh? Crystal does split, eh?"

"On lines and by laws of its own."

"You mean if there's a weak place?"

For all answer, after an hesitation, he took the bowl up again, holding it aloft and tapping it with a key. It rang with the finest sweetest sound. "Where's the weak place?"

She then did the question justice. "Well, for *me* only the price. I'm poor, you see—very poor. But I thank you and I'll think." The Prince, on the other side of the shop-window, had finally faced about and, as to see if she hadn't done, was trying to reach with his eyes the comparatively dim interior. "I like it," she said—"I want it. But I must decide what I can do."

The man, not ungraciously, resigned himself. "Well, I'll keep it for you."

The small quarter of an hour had had its marked oddity—this she felt even by the time the open air and the Bloomsbury aspects had again, in their protest against the truth of her gathered impression, made her more or less their own. Yet the oddity might have been registered as small as compared to the other effect that, before they had gone much further, she had to take account of with her companion. This latter was simply the effect of their having, by some tacit logic, some queer inevitability, quite dropped the idea of a continued pursuit. They didn't say so, but it was on the line of giving up Maggie's present that they practically proceeded—the line of giving it up without more reference to it. The Prince's first reference was in fact quite independently made. "I hope you satisfied yourself, before you had done, of what was the matter with that bowl."

"No indeed, I satisfied myself of nothing. Of nothing at least but that the more I looked at it the more I liked it, and that if you weren't so unaccommodating this would be just the occasion for your giving me the pleasure of accepting it."

He looked graver for her at this than he had looked all the morning. "Do you propose it seriously—without wishing to play me a trick?"

She wondered. "What trick would it be?"

He looked at her harder. "You mean you really don't know?"

"But know what?"

"Why what's the matter with it. You didn't see, all the while?"

She only continued, however, to stare. "How could *you* see—out in the street?"

"I saw before I went out. It was because I saw

that I did go out. I didn't want to have another scene with you before that rascal, and I judged you'd presently guess for yourself."

"Is he a rascal?" Charlotte asked. "His price is so moderate." She waited but a moment. "Five pounds. Really so little."

He continued to look at her. "Five pounds?"

"Five pounds."

He might have been doubting her word, but he was only, it appeared, gathering emphasis. "It would be dear—to make a gift of—at five shillings. If it had cost you even but fivepence I wouldn't take it from you."

"Then," she asked, "what *is* the matter?"

"Why it has a crack."

It sounded, on his lips, so sharp, it had such an authority, that she almost started, while her colour rose at the word. It was as if he had been right, though his assurance was wonderful. "You answer for it without having looked?"

"I did look. I saw the object itself. It told its story. No wonder it's cheap."

"But it's exquisite," Charlotte, as if with an interest in it now made even tenderer and stranger, found herself moved to insist.

"Of course it's exquisite. That's the danger."

Then a light visibly came to her—a light in which her friend suddenly and intensely showed. The reflexion of it, as she smiled at him, was in her own face. "The danger—I see—is because you're superstitious."

"Per Dio I'm superstitious! A crack's a crack —and an omen's an omen."

"You'd be afraid——?"

"Per Bacco!"

"For your happiness?"

"For my happiness."

"For your safety?"

"For my safety."

She just paused. "For your marriage?"

"For my marriage. For everything."

She thought again. "Thank goodness then that if there *be* a crack we know it! But if we may perish by cracks in things that we don't know——!" And she smiled with the sadness of it. "We can never then give each other anything."

He considered, but he met it. "Ah but one does know. *I* do at least—and by instinct. I don't fail. That will always protect me."

It was droll, the way he said such things; yet she liked him really the more for it. They fell in for her with a general, or rather with a special, vision. But she spoke with a mild despair. "What then will protect *me*?"

"Where I'm concerned *I* will. From me at least you've nothing to fear," he now quite amiably responded. "Anything you consent to accept from me——" But he paused.

"Well?"

"Well, shall be perfect."

"That's very fine," she presently answered. "It's vain, after all, for you to talk of my accepting things when you'll accept nothing from me."

Ah *there* better still he could meet her. "You attach an impossible condition. That, I mean, of my keeping your gift so to myself."

Well, she looked, before him there, at the condition —then abruptly, with a gesture, she gave it up. She had a headshake of disenchantment—so far as the idea had appealed to her. It all appeared too difficult. "Oh my 'condition'—I don't hold to it. You may cry it on the housetops—anything I ever do."

"Ah well, then——!" This made, he laughed, all the difference.

But it was too late. "Oh I don't care now! I *should* have liked the Bowl. But if that won't do there's nothing."

He considered this; he took it in, looking graver again; but after a moment he qualified. "Yet I shall want some day to give you something."

She wondered at him. "What day?"

"The day you marry. For you *will* marry. You *must*—seriously—marry."

She took it from him, but it determined in her the only words she was to have uttered, all the morning, that came out as if a spring had been pressed. "To make you feel better?"

"Well," he replied frankly, wonderfully—"it will. But here," he added, "is your hansom."

He had signalled—the cab was charging. She put out no hand for their separation, but she prepared to get in. Before she did so, however, she said what had been gathering while she waited. "Well, I would marry, I think, to have something from you in all freedom."

BOOK SECOND

I

Adam Verver, at Fawns, that autumn Sunday, might have been observed to open the door of the billiard-room with a certain freedom—might have been observed, that is, had there been a spectator in the field. The justification of the push he had applied, however, and of the push equally sharp that, to shut himself in, he again applied — the ground of this energy was precisely that he might here, however briefly, find himself alone, alone with the handful of letters, newspapers and other unopened missives, to which, during and since breakfast, he had lacked opportunity to give an eye. The vast square clean apartment was empty, and its large clear windows looked out into spaces of terrace and garden, of park and woodland and shining artificial lake, of richly-condensed horizon, all dark blue upland and church-towered village and strong cloud-shadow, which were, together, a thing to create the sense, with every one else at church, of one's having the world to one's self. We share this world, none the less, for the hour, with Mr. Verver; the very fact of his striking, as he would have said, for solitude, the fact of his quiet flight, almost on tiptoe, through tortuous corridors, investing him with an interest that makes our attention—tender indeed almost to compassion—qualify his achieved isolation. For it may immediately be mentioned that this amiable man bethought himself

of his personal advantage, in general, only when it might appear to him that other advantages, those of other persons, had successfully put in their claim. It may be mentioned also that he always figured other persons — such was the law of his nature — as a numerous array, and that, though conscious of but a single near tie, one affection, one duty deepest-rooted in his life, it had never for many minutes together been his portion not to feel himself surrounded and committed, never quite been his refreshment to make out where the many-coloured human appeal, represented by gradations of tint, diminishing concentric zones of intensity, of importunity, really faded to the impersonal whiteness for which his vision sometimes ached. It shaded off, the appeal—he would have admitted that ; but he had as yet noted no point at which it positively stopped.

Thus had grown in him a little habit—his innermost secret, not confided even to Maggie, though he felt she understood it, as she understood, to his view, everything—thus had shaped itself the innocent trick of occasionally making-believe that he had no conscience, or at least that blankness, in the field of duty, did reign for an hour ; a small game to which the few persons near enough to have caught him playing it, and of whom Mrs. Assingham, for instance, was one, attached indulgently that idea of quaintness, quite in fact that charm of the pathetic, involved in the preservation by an adult of one of childhood's toys. When he took a rare moment " off " he did so with the touching, confessing eyes of a man of forty-seven caught in the act of handling a relic of infancy—sticking on the head of a broken soldier or trying the lock of a wooden gun. It was essentially in him the *imitation* of depravity — which for amusement, as might have been, he practised " keeping up." In spite of practice he was still imperfect, for these so

artlessly-artful interludes were condemned, by the nature of the case, to brevity. He had fatally stamped himself—it was his own fault—a man who could be interrupted with impunity. The greatest of wonders moreover was exactly in this, that so interrupted a man should ever have got, as the phrase was, should above all have got so early, to where he was. It argued a special genius ; he was clearly a case of that. The spark of fire, the point of light, sat somewhere in his inward vagueness as a lamp before a shrine twinkles in the dark perspective of a church ; and while youth and early middle-age, while the stiff American breeze of example and opportunity were blowing upon it hard, had made of the chamber of his brain a strange workshop of fortune. This establishment, mysterious and almost anonymous, the windows of which, at hours of highest pressure, never seemed, for starers and wonderers, perceptibly to glow, must in fact have been during certain years the scene of an unprecedented, a miraculous white-heat, the receipt for producing which it was practically felt that the master of the forge couldn't have communicated even with the best intentions.

The essential pulse of the flame, the very action of the cerebral temperature, brought to the highest point, yet extraordinarily contained—these facts themselves *were* the immensity of the result ; they were one with perfection of machinery, they had constituted the kind of acquisitive power engendered and applied, the necessary triumph of all operations. A dim explanation of phenomena once vivid must at all events for the moment suffice us ; it being obviously no account of the matter to throw on our friend's amiability alone the weight of the demonstration of his economic history. Amiability, of a truth, is an aid to success ; it has even been known to be the principle of large accumulations ; but the link, for the mind, is none the

less fatally missing between proof, on such a scale, of continuity, if of nothing more insolent, in one field, and accessibility to distraction in every other. Variety of imagination—what is that but fatal in the world of affairs unless so disciplined as not to be distinguished from monotony? Mr. Verver then, for a fresh full period, a period betraying, extraordinarily, no wasted year, had been inscrutably monotonous behind an iridescent cloud. The cloud was his native envelope—the soft looseness, so to say, of his temper and tone, not directly expressive enough, no doubt, to figure an amplitude of folds, but of a quality unmistakable for sensitive feelers. He was still reduced in fine to getting his rare moments with himself by feigning a cynicism. His real inability to maintain the pretence, however, had perhaps not often been better instanced than by his acceptance of the inevitable to-day—his acceptance of it on the arrival, at the end of a quarter of an hour, of that element of obligation with which he had all the while known he must reckon. A quarter of an hour of egoism was about as much as he, taking one situation with another, usually got. Mrs. Rance opened the door—more tentatively indeed than he himself had just done; but on the other hand, as if to make up for this, she pushed forward even more briskly on seeing him than he had been moved to do on seeing nobody. Then with force it came home to him that he *had* a week before definitely established a precedent. He did her at least that justice—it was a kind of justice he was always doing somebody. He had on the previous Sunday liked to stop at home and had exposed himself thereby to be caught in the act. To make this possible, that is, Mrs. Rance had only had to like to do the same—the trick was so easily played. It hadn't occurred to him to plan in any way for her absence—which would have destroyed somehow in

principle the propriety of his own presence. If persons under his roof hadn't a right not to go to church what became, for a fair mind, of his own right ? His subtlest manœuvre had been simply to change from the library to the billiard-room, it being in the library that his guest, or his daughter's, or the guest of the Miss Lutches—he scarce knew in which light to regard her—had then, and not unnaturally of course, joined him. It was urged on him by his memory of the duration of the visit she had that time, as it were, paid him, that the law of recurrence would already have got itself enacted. She had spent the whole morning with him, was still there, in the library, when the others came back—thanks to her having been tepid about their taking, Mr. Verver and she, a turn outside. It had been as if she looked on that as a kind of subterfuge—almost as a form of disloyalty. Yet what was it she had in mind, what did she wish to make of him beyond what she had already made, a patient punctilious host, mindful that she had originally arrived much as a stranger, arrived not at all deliberately or yearningly invited ? —so that one positively had her possible susceptibilities the *more* on one's conscience. The Miss Lutches, the sisters from the Middle West, were there as friends of Maggie's, friends of the earlier time ; but Mrs. Rance was there—or at least had primarily appeared—only as a friend of the Miss Lutches.

This lady herself was not of the Middle West—she rather insisted on it—but of New Jersey, Rhode Island or Delaware, one of the smallest and most intimate States : he couldn't remember which, though she insisted too on that. It wasn't in him—we may say it for him—to go so far as to wonder if their group were next to be recruited by some friend of her own ; and this partly because she had struck him

verily rather as wanting to get the Miss Lutches themselves away than to extend the actual circle, and partly, as well as more essentially, because such connexion as he enjoyed with the ironic question in general resided substantially less in a personal use of it than in the habit of seeing it as easy to others. He was so framed by nature as to be able to keep his inconveniences separate from his resentments ; though indeed if the sum of these latter had at the most always been small, that was doubtless in some degree a consequence of the fewness of the former. His greatest inconvenience, he would have admitted had he analysed, was in finding it so taken for granted that as he had money he had force. It pressed upon him hard and all round assuredly, this attribution of power. Every one had need of one's power, whereas one's own need, at the best, would have seemed to be but some trick for not communicating it. The effect of a reserve so merely, so meanly defensive would in most cases, beyond question, sufficiently discredit the cause ; wherefore, though it was complicating to be perpetually treated as an infinite agent, the outrage was not the greatest of which a brave man might complain. Complaint, besides, was a luxury, and he dreaded the imputation of greed. The other, the constant imputation, that of being able to "do," would have no ground if he hadn't been, to start with —this was the point —provably luxurious. His lips somehow were closed—and by a spring connected moreover with the action of his eyes themselves. The latter showed him what he *had* done, showed him where he had come out ; quite at the top of his hill of difficulty, the tall sharp spiral round which he had begun to wind his ascent at the age of twenty, and the apex of which was a platform looking down, if one would, on the kingdoms of the earth and with standing-room for but half-a-dozen others.

His eyes, in any case, now saw Mrs. Rance approach with an instant failure to attach to the fact any grossness of avidity of Mrs. Rance's own—or at least to descry any triumphant use even for the luridest impression of her intensity. What was virtually supreme would be her vision of his having attempted, by his desertion of the library, to mislead her—which in point of fact barely escaped being what he had designed. It wasn't easy for him, in spite of accumulations fondly and funnily regarded as of systematic practice, not now to be ashamed ; the one thing comparatively easy would be to gloss over his course. The billiard-room was *not*, at the particular crisis, either a natural or a graceful place for the nominally main occupant of so large a house to retire to—and this without prejudice, either, to the fact that his visitor wouldn't, as he apprehended, explicitly make him a scene. Should she frankly denounce him for a sneak he would simply go to pieces ; but he was after an instant not afraid of that. Wouldn't she rather, as emphasising their communion, accept and in a manner exploit the anomaly, treat it perhaps as romantic or possibly even as comic ?—show at least that they needn't mind even though the vast table, draped in brown holland, thrust itself between them as an expanse of desert sand. She couldn't cross the desert, but she could, and did, beautifully get round it ; so that for him to change it into an obstacle he would have had to cause himself, as in some childish game or unbecoming romp, to be pursued, to be genially hunted. This last was a turn he was well aware the occasion should on no account take ; and there loomed before him—for the mere moment—the prospect of her fairly proposing that they should knock about the balls. That danger certainly, it struck him, he should manage in some way to deal with. Why too for that matter had he need of

defences, material or other ?—how was it a question of dangers really to be called such ? The deep danger, the only one that made him, as an idea, positively turn cold, would have been the possibility of her seeking him in marriage, of her bringing up between them that terrible issue. Here fortunately she was powerless, it being apparently so provable against her that she had a husband in undiminished existence.

She had him, it was true, only in America, only in Texas, in Nebraska, in Arizona or somewhere—somewhere that, at old Fawns House in the county of Kent, scarcely figured as a definite place at all ; it showed somehow from afar as so lost, so indistinct and illusory, in the great alkali desert of cheap Divorce. She had him even in bondage, poor man, had him in contempt, had him in remembrance so imperfect as barely to assert itself, but she had him, none the less, in existence unimpeached : the Miss Lutches had seen him in the flesh—as they had appeared eager to mention ; though when they were separately questioned their descriptions failed to tally. He would be at the worst, should it come to the worst, Mrs. Rance's difficulty, and he served therefore quite enough as the stout bulwark of any one else. This was in truth logic without a flaw, yet it gave Mr. Verver less comfort than it ought. He feared not only danger—he feared the idea of danger, or in other words feared, hauntedly, himself. It was above all as a symbol that Mrs. Rance actually rose before him —a symbol of the supreme effort that he should have sooner or later, as he felt, to make. This effort would be to say No—he lived in terror of having to. He should be proposed to at a given moment—it was only a question of time—and then he should have to do a thing that would be extremely disagreeable. He almost wished on occasion that he wasn't so sure he

would do it. He knew himself, however, well enough not to doubt : he knew coldly, quite bleakly, where he would, at the crisis, draw the line. It was Maggie's marriage and Maggie's finer happiness—happy as he had supposed her before—that had made the difference ; he hadn't in the other time, it now seemed to him, had to think of such things. They hadn't come up for him, and it was positively as if she had herself kept them down. She had only been his child —which she was indeed as much as ever ; but there were sides on which she had protected him as if she were more than a daughter. She had done for him more than he knew—much, and blissfully, as he always *had* known. If she did at present more than ever, through having what she called the change in his life to make up to him for, his situation still, all the same, kept pace with her activity—his situation being simply that there was more than ever to be done.

There hadn't yet been quite so much, on all the showing, as since their return from their twenty months in America, as since their settlement again in England, experimental though it was, and the consequent sense, now quite established for him, of a domestic air that had cleared and lightened, producing the effect, for their common personal life, of wider perspectives and large waiting spaces. It was as if his son-in-law's presence, even from before his becoming his son-in-law, had somehow filled the scene and blocked the future—very richly and handsomely, when all was said, not at all inconveniently or in ways not to have been desired : inasmuch as though the Prince, his measure now practically taken, was still pretty much the same " big fact," the sky had lifted, the horizon receded, the very foreground itself expanded, quite to match him, quite to keep everything in comfortable scale. At first, certainly, their

decent little old-time union, Maggie's and his own, had resembled a good deal some pleasant public square, in the heart of an old city, into which a great Palladian church, say — something with a grand architectural front—had suddenly been dropped ; so that the rest of the place, the space in front, the way round, outside, to the east end, the margin of street and passage, the quantity of overarching heaven, had been temporarily compromised. Not even then, of a truth, in a manner disconcerting—given, that is, for the critical, or at least the intelligent eye, the great style of the façade and its high place in its class. The phenomenon that had since occurred, whether originally to have been pronounced calculable or not, hadn't, naturally, been the miracle of a night, but had taken place so gradually, quietly, easily, that from this vantage of wide wooded Fawns, with its eighty rooms, as they said, with its spreading park, with its acres and acres of garden and its majesty of artificial lake—though that, for a person so familiar with the "great" ones, might be rather ridiculous—no visibility of transition showed, no violence of accommodation, in retrospect, emerged. The Palladian church was always there, but the piazza took care of itself. The sun stared down in his fulness, the air circulated, and the public not less ; the limit stood off, the way round was easy, the east end was as fine, in its fashion, as the west, and there were also side doors of entrance between the two—large, monumental, ornamental, in *their* style—as for all proper great churches. By some such process in fine had the Prince, for his father-in-law, while remaining solidly a feature, ceased to be at all ominously a block.

Mr. Verver, it may further be mentioned, had taken at no moment sufficient alarm to have kept in detail the record of his reassurance ; but he would none the

less not have been unable, not really have been indisposed, to impart in confidence to the right person his notion of the history of the matter. The right person—it is equally distinct—had not, for this illumination, been wanting, but had been encountered in the form of Fanny Assingham, not for the first time indeed admitted to his counsels, and who would have doubtless at present, in any case, from plenitude of interest and with equal guarantees, repeated his secret. It all came then, the great clearance, from the one prime fact that the Prince, by good fortune, hadn't proved angular. He clung to that description of his daughter's husband as he often did to terms and phrases, in the human, the social connexion, that he had found for himself: it was his way to have times of using these constantly, as if they just then lighted the world, or his own path in it, for him—even when for some of his interlocutors they covered less ground. It was true that with Mrs. Assingham he never felt quite sure of the ground anything covered; she disputed with him so little, agreed with him so much, surrounded him with such systematic consideration, such predetermined tenderness, that it was almost—which he had once told her in irritation—as if she were nursing a sick baby. He had accused her of not taking him seriously, and she had replied—as from her it couldn't frighten him—that she took him religiously, adoringly. She had laughed again, as she had laughed before, on his producing for her that good right word about the happy issue of his connexion with the Prince—with an effect the more odd perhaps as she hadn't contested its value. She couldn't of course, however, be at the best as much in love with his discovery as he was himself. He was so much so that he fairly worked it—to his own comfort; came in fact sometimes near publicly pointing the moral of what might have occurred if friction,

so to speak, had occurred. He pointed it frankly one day to the personage in question, mentioned to the Prince the particular justice he did him, was even explicit as to the danger that in their remarkable relation they had thus escaped. Oh if he *had* been angular !—who could say what might *then* have happened ? He spoke—and it was the way he had spoken to Mrs. Assingham too—as if he grasped the facts, without exception, for which angularity stood.

It figured for him clearly as a final idea, a conception of the last vividness. He might have been signifying by it the sharp corners and hard edges, all the stony pointedness, the grand right geometry of his spreading Palladian church. Just so he was insensible to no feature of the felicity of a contact that, beguilingly, almost confoundingly, was a contact but with practically yielding lines and curved surfaces. " You're round, my boy," he had said—" you're *all*, you're variously and inexhaustibly round, when you might, by all the chances, have been abominably square. I'm not sure, for that matter," he had added, " that you're *not* square in the general mass—whether abominably or not. The abomination isn't a question, for you're inveterately round—that's what I mean—in the detail. It's the sort of thing in you that one feels—or at least I do—with one's hand. Say you had been formed all over in a lot of little pyramidal lozenges like that wonderful side of the Ducal Palace in Venice—so lovely in a building, but so damnable, for rubbing against, in a man, and especially in a near relation. I can see them all from here—each of them sticking out by itself—all the architectural cut diamonds that would have scratched one's softer sides. One would have been scratched by diamonds—doubtless the neatest way if one was to be scratched at all—but one would have been more or less reduced to a hash. As it is, for living with,

you're a pure and perfect crystal. I give you my idea —I think you ought to have it—just as it has come to me." The Prince had taken the idea, in his way, for he was well accustomed by this time to taking; and nothing perhaps even could more have confirmed Mr. Verver's account of his surface than the manner in which these golden drops evenly flowed over it. They caught in no interstice, they gathered in no concavity; the uniform smoothness betrayed the dew but by showing for a moment a richer tone. The young man, in other words, unconfusedly smiled—though indeed as if assenting, from principle and habit, to more than he understood. He liked all signs that things were well, but he cared rather less *why* they were.

In regard to the people among whom he had since his marriage been living, the reasons they so frequently gave—so much oftener than he had ever heard reasons given before—remained on the whole the element by which he most differed from them; and his father-in-law and his wife were after all only first among the people among whom he had been living. He was never even yet sure of how, at this, that or the other point, he would strike them; they felt remarkably, so often, things he hadn't meant, and missed not less remarkably, and not less often, things he had. He had fallen back on his general explanation—"We haven't the same values"; by which he understood the same measure of importance. His "curves" apparently were important because they had been unexpected, or, still more, unconceived; whereas when one had always, as in *his* relegated old world, taken curves, and in much greater quantities too, for granted, one was no more surprised at the resulting feasibility of intercourse than one was surprised at being upstairs in a house that had a staircase. He had in fact on this occasion disposed alertly enough

of the subject of Mr. Verver's approbation. The promptitude of his answer, we may in fact well surmise, had sprung not a little from a particular kindled remembrance ; this had given his acknowledgment its easiest turn. " Oh if I'm a crystal I'm delighted that I'm a perfect one, for I believe they sometimes have cracks and flaws—in which case they're to be had very cheap ! " He had stopped short of the emphasis it would have given his joke to add that there had been certainly no having *him* cheap ; and it was doubtless a mark of the good taste practically reigning between them that Mr. Verver hadn't on his side either taken up the opportunity. It is the latter's relation to such aspects, however, that now most concerns us, and the bearing of his pleased view of this absence of friction upon Amerigo's character as a representative precious object. Representative precious objects, great ancient pictures and other works of art, fine eminent " pieces " in gold, in silver, in enamel, majolica, ivory, bronze, had for a number of years so multiplied themselves round him and, as a general challenge to acquisition and appreciation, so engaged all the faculties of his mind, that the instinct, the particular sharpened appetite of the collector, had fairly served as a basis for his acceptance of the Prince's suit.

Over and above the signal fact of the impression made on Maggie herself, the aspirant to his daughter's hand showed somehow the great marks and signs, stood before him with the high authenticities, he had learnt to look for in pieces of the first order. Adam Verver knew by this time, knew thoroughly ; no man in Europe or in America, he privately believed, was for such estimates less capable of vulgar mistakes. He had never spoken of himself as infallible—it wasn't his way ; but apart from the natural affections

he had acquainted himself with no greater joy of the intimately personal type than the joy of his originally coming to feel, and all so unexpectedly, that he had in him the spirit of the connoisseur. He had, like many other persons, in the course of his reading, been struck with Keats's sonnet about stout Cortez in the presence of the Pacific ; but it was probable that few persons had so devoutly fitted the poet's grand image to a fact of experience. It consorted so with Mr. Verver's consciousness of the way in which at a given moment he had stared at *his* Pacific that a couple of perusals of the immortal lines had sufficed to stamp them in his memory. His " peak in Darien " was the sudden hour that had transformed his life, the hour of his perceiving with a mute inward gasp akin to the low moan of apprehensive passion that a world was left him to conquer and that he might conquer it if he tried. It had been a turning of the page of the book of life—as if a leaf long inert had moved at a touch and, eagerly reversed, had made such a stir of the air as sent up into his face the very breath of the Golden Isles. To rifle the Golden Isles had become on the spot the business of his future, and with the sweetness of it—what was most wondrous of all—still more even in the thought than in the act. The thought was that of the affinity of Genius, or at least of Taste, with something in himself—with the dormant intelligence of which he had thus almost violently become aware and that affected him as changing by a mere revolution of the screw his whole intellectual plane. He was equal somehow with the great seers, the invokers and encouragers of beauty—and he didn't after all perhaps dangle so far below the great producers and creators. He had been nothing of that kind before—too decidedly, too dreadfully not ; but now he saw *why* he had been what he had, why he had failed and fallen short even in huge success ;

now he read into his career, in one single magnificent night, the immense meaning it had waited for.

It was during his first visit to Europe after the death of his wife, when his daughter was ten years old, that the light, in his mind, had so broken—and he had even made out at that time why on an earlier occasion, the journey of his honeymoon year, it had still been closely covered. He had "bought" then, so far as he had been able, but he had bought almost wholly for the frail fluttered creature at his side, who had had her fancies, decidedly, but all for the art, then wonderful to both of them, of the Rue de la Paix, the costly authenticities of dressmakers and jewellers. Her flutter—pale disconcerted ghost as she actually was, a broken white flower tied round, almost grotesquely for his present sense, with a huge satin "bow" of the Boulevard—her flutter had been mainly that of ribbons, frills and fine fabrics; all funny pathetic evidence, for memory, of the bewilderments overtaking them as a bridal pair confronted with opportunity. He could wince fairly still as he remembered the sense in which the poor girl's pressure had, under his fond encouragement indeed, been exerted in favour of purchase and curiosity. These were wandering images, out of the earlier dusk, that threw her back for his pity into a past more remote than he liked their common past, their young affection, to appear. It would have had to be admitted, to an insistent criticism, that Maggie's mother, all too strangely, hadn't so much failed of faith as of the right application of it; since she had exercised it eagerly and restlessly, made it a pretext for innocent perversities in respect to which philosophic time was at last to reduce all groans to gentleness. And they had loved each other so that his own intelligence, on the higher line, had temporarily paid for it. The futilities, the enormities, the depravities

of decoration and ingenuity that before his sense was unsealed she had made him think lovely! Musing, reconsidering little man that he was, and addicted to silent pleasures—as he was accessible to silent pains —he even sometimes wondered what would have become of his intelligence, in the sphere in which it was to learn more and more exclusively to play, if his wife's influence on it hadn't been, in the strange scheme of things, so promptly removed. Would she have led him altogether, attached as he was to her, into the wilderness of mere mistakes? Would she have prevented him from ever scaling his vertiginous Peak?—or would she otherwise have been able to accompany him to that eminence, where he might have pointed out to her, as Cortez to *his* companions, the revelation vouchsafed? No companion of Cortez had presumably been a real lady: Mr. Verver allowed that historic fact to determine his inference.

II

What was at all events not permanently hidden from him was a truth much less invidious about his years of darkness. It was the strange scheme of things again : the years of darkness had been needed to render possible the years of light. A wiser hand than he at first knew had kept him hard at acquisition of one sort as a perfect preliminary to acquisition of another, and the preliminary would have been weak and wanting if the good faith of it had been less. His comparative blindness had made the good faith, which in its turn had made the soil propitious for the flower of the supreme idea. He had had to *like* forging and sweating, he had had to like polishing and piling up his arms. They were things at least he had had to believe he liked, just as he had believed he liked transcendent calculation and imaginative gambling all for themselves, the creation of " interests " that were the extinction of other interests, the livid vulgarity even of getting in, or getting out, first. That had of course been so far from really the case—with the supreme idea all the while growing and striking deep, under everything, in the warm rich earth. He had stood unknowing, he had walked and worked where it was buried, and the fact itself, the fact of his fortune, would have been a barren fact enough if the first sharp tender shoot had never struggled into day. There on one side was the ugliness his middle time had

been spared ; there on the other, from all the portents, was the beauty with which his age might still be crowned. He was happier doubtless than he deserved ; but *that*, when one was happy at all, it was easy to be. He had wrought by devious ways, but he had reached the place, and what would ever have been straighter in any man's life than his way henceforth of occupying it ? It hadn't merely his plan, all the sanctions of civilisation ; it was positively civilisation condensed, concrete, consummate, set down by his hands as a house on a rock—a house from whose open doors and windows, open to grateful, to thirsty millions, the higher, the highest knowledge would shine out to bless the land. In this house, designed as a gift primarily to the people of his adoptive city and native State, the urgency of whose release from the bondage of ugliness he was in a position to measure—in this museum of museums, a palace of art which was to show for compact as a Greek temple was compact, a receptacle of treasures sifted to positive sanctity, his spirit to-day almost altogether lived, making up, as he would have said, for lost time and haunting the portico in anticipation of the final rites.

These would be the "opening exercises," the august dedication of the place. His imagination, he was well aware, got over the ground faster than his judgement ; there was much still to do for the production of his first effect. Foundations were laid and walls were rising, the structure of the shell all determined ; but raw haste was forbidden him in a connexion so intimate with the highest effects of patience and piety ; he should belie himself by completing without a touch at least of the majesty of delay a monument to the religion he wished to propagate, the exemplary passion, the passion for perfection at any price. He was far from knowing as yet where he would end, but he was admirably definite as to where

he wouldn't begin. He wouldn't begin with a small show—he would begin with a great, and he could scarce have indicated, even had he wished to try, the line of division he had drawn. He had taken no trouble to indicate it to his fellow-citizens, purveyors and consumers, in his own and the circumjacent commonwealths, of comic matter in large lettering, diurnally "set up," printed, published, folded and delivered, at the expense of his presumptuous emulation of the snail. The snail had become for him, under this ironic suggestion, the loveliest beast in nature, and his return to England, of which we are present witnesses, hadn't been unconnected with the appreciation so determined. It marked what he liked to mark, that he needed, on the matter in question, instruction from no one on earth. A couple of years of Europe again, of renewed nearness to changes and chances, refreshed sensibility to the currents of the market, would fall in with the consistency of wisdom, the particular shade of enlightened conviction, that he wished to observe. It didn't look like much for a whole family to hang about waiting—they being now, since the birth of his grandson, a whole family ; and there was henceforth only one ground in all the world, he felt, on which the question of appearance would ever really again count for him. He cared that a work of art of price should "look like" the master to whom it might perhaps be deceitfully attributed ; but he had ceased on the whole to know any matter of the rest of life by its looks.

He took life in general higher up the stream ; so far as he wasn't actually taking it as a collector he was taking it decidedly as a grandfather. In the way of precious small pieces he had handled nothing so precious as the Principino, his daughter's first-born, whose Italian designation endlessly amused him and whom he could manipulate and dandle, already almost

toss and catch again, as he couldn't a correspondingly rare morsel of an earlier *pâte tendre*. He could take the small clutching child from his nurse's arms with an iteration grimly discountenanced, in respect to their contents, by the glass doors of high cabinets. Something clearly beatific in this new relation had moreover without doubt confirmed for him the sense that none of his silent answers to public detraction, to local vulgarity, had ever been so legitimately straight as the mere element of attitude—reduce it, he said, to that—in his easy weeks at Fawns. The element of attitude was all he wanted of these weeks, and he was enjoying it on the spot even more than he had hoped : enjoying it in spite of Mrs. Rance and the Miss Lutches ; in spite of the small worry of his belief that Fanny Assingham had really something for him that she was keeping back ; in spite of his full consciousness, overflowing the cup like a wine too generously poured, that if he had consented to marry his daughter, and thereby to make, as it were, the difference, what surrounded him now *was* exactly consent vivified, marriage demonstrated, the difference in fine decidedly made. He could call back his prior, his own wedded consciousness—it wasn't yet out of range of vague reflexion. He had supposed himself, above all he had supposed his wife, *as* married as any one could be, and yet he wondered if their state had deserved the name, or their union worn the beauty, in the degree to which the couple now before him carried the matter. In especial since the birth of their boy in New York—the grand climax of their recent American period, brought to so right an issue—the happy pair struck him as having carried it higher, deeper, further ; to where it ceased to concern his imagination at any rate to follow them. Extraordinary, beyond question, was one branch of his characteristic mute wonderment—it characterised

above all, with its subject before it, his modesty: the strange dim doubt, waking up for him at the end of the years, of whether Maggie's mother had after all been capable of the maximum. The maximum of tenderness he meant—as the terms existed for him; the maximum of immersion in the fact of being married. Maggie herself was capable; Maggie herself, at this season, was, exquisitely, divinely, the maximum: such was the impression that, positively holding off a little for the practical, the tactful consideration it inspired in him, a respect for the beauty and sanctity of it almost amounting to awe—such was the impression he daily received from her. She was her mother, oh yes—but her mother and something more; it becoming thus a new light for him, and in such a curious way too, that anything more than her mother should prove at this time of day possible.

He could live over again at almost any quiet moment the long process of his introduction to all present interests—an introduction that had depended all on himself, like the "cheek" of the young man who approaches a boss without credentials or picks up an acquaintance, makes even a real friend, by speaking to a passer in the street. *His* real friend, in all the business, was to have been his own mind, with which nobody had put him in relation. He had knocked at the door of that essentially private house, and his call, in truth, had not been immediately answered; so that when, after waiting and coming back, he had at last got in, it was, twirling his hat, as an embarrassed stranger, or, trying his keys, as a thief at night. He had gained confidence only with time, but when he had taken real possession of the place it had been never again to come away. All of which success represented, it must be allowed, his one principle of pride. Pride in the mere original spring, pride in

his money, would have been pride in something that had come, in comparison, so easily. The right ground for elation was difficulty mastered, and his difficulty—thanks to his modesty—had been to believe in his facility. *This* was the problem he had worked out to its solution—the solution that was now doing more than all else to make his feet settle and his days flush ; and when he wished to feel " good," as they said at American City, he had but to retrace his immense development. That was what the whole thing came back to—that the development had not been somebody's else passing falsely, accepted too ignobly, for his. To think how servile he might have been was absolutely to respect himself, was in fact, as much as he liked, to admire himself, as free. The very finest spring that ever responded to his touch was always there to press—the memory of his freedom as dawning upon him, like a sunrise all pink and silver, during a winter divided between Florence, Rome and Naples some three years after his wife's death. It was the hushed daybreak of the Roman revelation in particular that he could usually best recover—the way that there above all, where the princes and popes had been before him, his divination of his faculty had gone to his head. He was a plain American citizen staying at an hotel where sometimes for days together there were twenty others like him ; but no pope, no prince of them all had read a richer meaning, he believed, into the character of the Patron of Art. He was ashamed of them really, if he wasn't afraid, and he had on the whole never so climbed to the tip-top as in judging, over a perusal of Hermann Grimm, where Julius II. and Leo X. were " placed " by their treatment of Michael Angelo. Far below the plain American citizen—in the case at least in which this personage happened not to be too plain to be Adam Verver. Going to our friend's

head, moreover, some of the results of such comparisons may doubtless be described as having stayed there. His freedom to see—of which the comparisons were part—what could it do but steadily grow and grow ?

It came perhaps even too much to stand to him for *all* freedom—since for example it was as much there as ever at the very time of Mrs. Rance's conspiring against him, at Fawns, with the billiard-room and the Sunday morning, on the occasion round which we have perhaps drawn our circle too wide. Mrs. Rance at least controlled practically each other license of the present and the near future : the license to pass the hour as he would have found convenient ; the license to stop remembering for a little that though if proposed to—and not only by this aspirant but by any other—he wouldn't prove foolish, the proof of wisdom was none the less in such a fashion rather cruelly conditioned ; the license in especial to proceed from his letters to his journals and insulate, orientate himself afresh by the sound, over his gained interval, of the many-mouthed monster the exercise of whose lungs he so constantly stimulated. Mrs. Rance remained with him till the others came back from church, and it was by that time clearer than ever that his ordeal, when it should arrive, would be really most unpleasant. His impression — this was the point—took somehow the form not so much of her wanting to press home her own advantage as of her building better than she knew ; that is of her symbolising, with virtual unconsciousness, his own special deficiency, his unfortunate lack of a wife to whom applications could be referred. The applications, the contingencies with which Mrs. Rance struck him as potentially bristling, were really not of a sort to be met by one's self. And the possibility of them, when his visitor said, or as good as said, " I'm restrained,

you see, because of Mr. Rance, and also because I'm proud and refined ; but if it *wasn't* for Mr. Rance and for my refinement and my pride ! "—the possibility of them, I say, turned to a great murmurous rustle, of a volume to fill the future ; a rustle of petticoats, of scented many-paged letters, of voices as to which, distinguish themselves as they might from each other, it mattered little in what part of the resounding country they had learned to make themselves prevail. The Assinghams and the Miss Lutches had taken the walk, through the park, to the little old church, " on the property," that our friend had often found himself wishing he were able to transport, as it stood, for its simple sweetness, in a glass case, to one of his exhibitory halls ; while Maggie had induced her husband, not inveterate in such practices, to make with her, by carriage, the somewhat longer pilgrimage to the nearest altar, modest though it happened to be, of the faith—her own as it had been her mother's, and as Mr. Verver himself had been loosely willing always to let it be taken for *his*—without the solid ease of which, making the stage firm and smooth, the drama of her marriage mightn't have been acted out.

What at last appeared to have happened, however, was that the divided parties, coming back at the same moment, had met outside and then drifted together from empty room to room, yet not in mere aimless quest of the pair of companions they had left at home. The quest had carried them to the door of the billiard-room, and their appearance, as it opened to admit them, determined for Adam Verver, in the oddest way in the world, a new and sharp perception. It *was* really remarkable : this perception expanded, on the spot, as a flower, one of the strangest, might at a breath have suddenly opened. The breath, for that matter, was more than anything else the look in his daughter's eyes—the look with which he *saw* her take

in exactly what had occurred in her absence: Mrs. Rance's pursuit of him to this remote locality, the spirit and the very form, perfectly characteristic, of his acceptance of the complication—the seal set in short unmistakably on one of Maggie's anxieties. The anxiety, it was true, would have been, even though not imparted, separately shared; for Fanny Assingham's face was, by the same stroke, not at all thickly veiled for him, and a queer light, of a colour quite to match, fairly glittered in the four fine eyes of the Miss Lutches. Each of these persons—counting out, that is, the Prince and the Colonel, who didn't care, and who didn't even see that the others did—knew something, or had at any rate had her idea; the idea, precisely, that this was what Mrs. Rance, artfully biding her time, *would* do. The special shade of apprehension on the part of the Miss Lutches might indeed have suggested the vision of an energy supremely asserted. It was droll, in truth, if one came to that, the position of the Miss Lutches: they had themselves brought, they had guilelessly introduced Mrs. Rance, strong in the fact of Mr. Rance's having been literally beheld of them; and it was now for them positively as if their handful of flowers—since Mrs. Rance *was* a handful!—had been but the vehicle of a dangerous snake. Mr. Verver fairly felt in the air the Miss Lutches' imputation—in the intensity of which, really, his own propriety might have been involved.

That, none the less, was but a flicker; what made the real difference, as I have hinted, was his mute passage with Maggie. His daughter's anxiety alone had depths, and it opened out for him the wider that it was altogether new. When, in their common past, when till this moment, had she shown a fear, however dumbly, for his individual life? They had had fears together just as they had had joys, but all of hers

at least had been for what equally concerned them. Here of a sudden was a question that concerned him alone, and the soundless explosion of it somehow marked a date. He was on her mind, he was even in a manner on her hands—as a distinct thing, that is from being, where he had always been, merely deep in her heart and in her life ; too deep down, as it were, to be disengaged, contrasted or opposed, in short objectively presented. But time finally had done it ; their relation was altered : he again *saw* the difference lighted for her. This marked it to himself—and it wasn't a question simply of a Mrs. Rance the more or the less. For Maggie too at a stroke, almost beneficently, their visitor had, from being an inconvenience, become a sign. They had made vacant by their marriage his immediate foreground, his personal precinct—they being the Princess and the Prince. They had made room in it for others—so others had become aware. He became aware himself, for that matter, during the minute Maggie stood there before speaking ; and with the sense moreover of what he saw her see he had the sense of what she saw *him*. This last, it may be added, would have been his intensest perception hadn't there the next instant been more for him in Fanny Assingham. Her face couldn't keep it from him ; she had seen, on top of everything, in her quick way, what they both were seeing.

III

So much mute communication was doubtless all this time marvellous, and we may confess to having perhaps read into the scene prematurely a critical character that took longer to develop. Yet the quiet hour of reunion enjoyed that afternoon by the father and the daughter did really little else than deal with the elements definitely presented to each in the vibration produced by the return of the church-goers. Nothing allusive, nothing at all insistent, passed between them either before or immediately after luncheon—except indeed so far as their failure soon again to meet might be itself an accident charged with reference. The hour or two after luncheon—and on Sundays with especial rigour, for one of the domestic reasons of which it belonged to Maggie quite multitudinously to take account—were habitually spent by the Princess with her little boy, in whose apartment she either frequently found her father already established or was sooner or later joined by him. His visit to his grandson, at some hour or other, held its place, in his day, against all interventions, and this without counting his grandson's visits to *him*, scarcely less ordered and timed, and the odd bits, as he called them, that they picked up together when they could—communions snatched, for the most part, on the terrace, in the gardens or the park, while the Principino, with much pomp and

circumstance of perambulator, parasol, fine lace over-veiling and incorruptible female attendance, took the air. In the private apartments, which, occupying in the great house the larger part of a wing of their own, were not much more easily accessible than if the place had been a royal palace and the small child an heir-apparent—in the nursery of nurseries the talk, at these instituted times, was always so prevailingly with or about the master of the scene that other interests and other topics had fairly learned to avoid the slighting and inadequate notice there taken of them. They came in at the best but as involved in the little boy's future, his past, or his comprehensive present, never getting so much as a chance to plead their own merits or to complain of being neglected. Nothing perhaps in truth had done more than this united participation to confirm in the elder parties that sense of a life not only uninterrupted but more deeply associated, more largely combined, of which, on Adam Verver's behalf, we have made some mention. It was of course an old story and a familiar idea that a beautiful baby could take its place as a new link between a wife and a husband, but Maggie and her father had, with every ingenuity, converted the precious creature into a link between a mamma and a grandpapa. The Principino, for a chance spectator of this process, might have become, by an untoward stroke, a hapless half-orphan, with the place of immediate male parent swept bare and open to the next nearest sympathy.

They had no occasion thus, the conjoined worshippers, to talk of what the Prince might be or might do for his son—the sum of service, in his absence, so completely filled itself out. It was not in the least moreover that there was doubt of him, for he was conspicuously addicted to the manipulation

of the child, in the frank Italian way, at such moments as he judged discreet in respect to other claims: conspicuously indeed, that is, for Maggie, who had more occasion, on the whole, to speak to her husband of the extravagance of her father than to speak to her father of the extravagance of her husband. Adam Verver had, all round, in this connexion, his own serenity. He was sure of his son-in-law's auxiliary admiration—admiration, he meant, of his grandson; since, to begin with, what else had been at work but the instinct—or it might fairly have been the tradition—of the former's making the child so solidly beautiful as to *have* to be admired? What contributed most to harmony in this play of relations, however, was the way the young man seemed to leave it to be gathered that, tradition for tradition, the grandpapa's own was not, in any estimate, to go for nothing. A tradition, or whatever it was, that had flowered prelusively in the Princess herself—well, Amerigo's very discretions were his way of taking account of it. His discriminations in respect to his heir were in fine not more angular than any others to be observed in him; and Mr. Verver received perhaps from no source so distinct an impression of being for him an odd and important phenomenon as he received from this impunity of appropriation, these unchallenged nursery hours. It was as if the grandpapa's special show of the character were but another side for the observer to study, another item for him to note. It came back, this latter personage knew, to his own previous perception—that of the Prince's inability, in any matter in which he was concerned, to *conclude*. The idiosyncrasy, for him, at each stage, had to be demonstrated—on which, however, he admirably accepted it. This last was after all the point; he really worked, poor young man, for acceptance, since he worked so

constantly for comprehension. And how, when you came to that, *could* you know that a horse wouldn't shy at a brass-band, in a country road, because it didn't shy at a traction-engine? It might have been brought up to traction-engines without having been brought up to brass-bands. Little by little thus from month to month the Prince was learning what his wife's father had been brought up to; and now it could be checked off—he had been brought up to the romantic view of *principini*. Who would have thought it, and where would it all stop? The only fear somewhat sharp for Mr. Verver was a certain fear of disappointing him for strangeness. He felt that the evidence he offered, thus viewed, was too much on the positive side. He didn't know—he was learning, and it was funny for him—to how many things he *had* been brought up. If the Prince could only strike something to which he hadn't! This wouldn't, it seemed to him, ruffle the smoothness, and yet *might* a little add to the interest.

What was now clear at all events for the father and the daughter was their simply knowing they wanted, for the time, to be together—at any cost, as it were; and their necessity so worked in them as to bear them out of the house, in a quarter hidden from that in which their friends were gathered, and cause them to wander, unseen, unfollowed, along a covered walk in the "old" garden, as it was called, old with an antiquity of formal things, high box and shaped yew and expanses of brick wall that had turned at once to purple and to pink. They went out of a door in the wall, a door that had a slab with a date set above it, 1713, but in the old multiplied lettering, and then had before them a small white gate, intensely white and clean amid all the greenness, through which they gradually passed to where some of the grandest trees spaciously clustered and where

they would find one of the quietest places. A bench had been placed long ago beneath a great oak that helped to crown a mild eminence, and the ground sank away below it, to rise again, opposite, at a distance sufficient to enclose the solitude and figure a bosky horizon. Summer, blissfully, was with them yet, and the low sun made a splash of light where it pierced the looser shade; Maggie, coming down to go out, had brought a parasol, which, as over her charming bare head she now handled it, gave, with the big straw hat that her father in these days always wore a good deal tipped back, definite intention to their walk. They knew the bench; it was "sequestered"—they had praised it for that together before and liked the word; and after they had begun to linger there they could have smiled (if they hadn't been really too serious and if the question hadn't so soon ceased to matter) over the probable wonder of the others as to what would have become of them.

The extent to which they enjoyed their indifference to any judgement of their want of ceremony, what did that of itself speak but for the way that, as a rule, they almost equally had others on their mind? They each knew that both were full of the superstition of not "hurting," but might precisely have been asking themselves, asking in fact each other, at this moment, whether that was to be after all the last word of their conscientious development. Certain it was at all events that in addition to the Assinghams and the Lutches and Mrs. Rance the attendance at tea just in the right place on the west terrace might perfectly comprise the four or five persons—among them the very pretty, the typically Irish Miss Maddock, vaunted announced and now brought—from the couple of other houses near enough, one of these the minor residence of their proprietor, established

thriftily, while he hired out his ancestral home, within sight and sense of his profit. It wasn't less certain either that for once in a way the group in question must all take the case as they found it. Fanny Assingham, at any time, for that matter, might perfectly be trusted to see Mr. Verver and his daughter, to see their reputation for a decent friendliness, through any momentary danger; might be trusted even to carry off their absence for Amerigo, for Amerigo's possible funny Italian anxiety; Amerigo always being, as the Princess was well aware, conveniently amenable to his friend's explanations, beguilements, reassurances, and perhaps in fact rather more than less dependent on them as his new life—since that was his own name for it—opened out. It was no secret to Maggie—it was indeed positively a public joke for her—that she couldn't explain as Mrs. Assingham did, and that, the Prince liking explanations, liking them almost as if he collected them, in the manner of book-plates or postage-stamps, for themselves, his requisition of this luxury had to be met. He didn't seem to want them as yet for use—rather for ornament and amusement, innocent amusement of the kind he most fancied and that was so characteristic of his blessed beautiful general, his slightly indolent lack of more dissipated or even just of more sophisticated tastes.

However that might be the dear woman had come to be frankly and gaily recognised—and not least by herself—as filling in the intimate little circle an office that was not always a sinecure. It was almost as if she had taken, with her kind melancholy Colonel at her heels, a responsible engagement; to be within call, as it were, for all those appeals that sprang out of talk, that sprang not a little, doubtless too, out of leisure. It naturally led, her position in the household as she called it, to considerable frequency of

presence, to visits, from the good couple, freely repeated and prolonged, and not so much as under form of protest. She was there to keep him quiet—it was Amerigo's own description of her influence; and it would only have needed a more visible disposition to unrest in him to make the account perfectly fit. Fanny herself limited indeed, she minimised, her office; you didn't need a jailor, she contended, for a domesticated lamb tied up with pink ribbon. This wasn't an animal to be controlled—it was an animal to be, at the most, educated. She admitted accordingly that she was educative—which Maggie was so aware that she herself inevitably wasn't; so it came round to being true that what she was most in charge of was his mere intelligence. This left, goodness knew, plenty of different calls for Maggie to meet—in a case in which so much pink ribbon, as it might be symbolically named, was lavished on the creature. What it all amounted to at any rate was that Mrs. Assingham would be keeping him quiet now, while his wife and his father-in-law carried out their own little frugal picnic; quite moreover, doubtless, not much less neededly in respect to the members of the circle that were with them there than in respect to the pair they were missing almost for the first time. It was present to Maggie that the Prince could bear, when he was with his wife, almost any queerness on the part of people, strange English types, who bored him, beyond convenience, by being so little as he himself was; for this was one of the ways in which a wife was practically sustaining. But she was as positively aware that she hadn't yet learned to see him as meeting such exposure in her absence. How did he move and walk, how above all did he, or how *would* he, look—he who with his so nobly handsome face could look such wonderful things—in case of being left

alone with some of the subjects of his wonder? There were subjects for wonder among these very neighbours; only Maggie herself had her own odd way—which didn't moreover the least irritate him—of really liking them in proportion as they could strike her as strange. It came out in her by heredity, he amused himself with declaring, this love of *chinoiseries*; but she actually this evening didn't mind—he might deal with her Chinese as he could.

Maggie indeed would always have had for such moments, had they oftener occurred, the impression made on her by a word of Mrs. Assingham's, a word referring precisely to that appetite in Amerigo for the explanatory which we have just found in our path. It wasn't that the Princess could be indebted to another person, even to so clever a one as this friend, for *seeing* anything in her husband that she mightn't see unaided; but she had ever, hitherto, been of a nature to accept with modest gratitude any better description of a felt truth than her little limits—terribly marked, she knew, in the direction of saying the right things—enabled her to make. Thus it was at any rate that she was able to live more or less in the light of the fact expressed so lucidly by their common comforter—the fact that the Prince was saving up, for some very mysterious but very fine eventual purpose, all the wisdom, all the answers to his questions, all the impressions and generalisations he gathered; putting them away and packing them down because he wanted his great gun to be loaded to the brim on the day he should decide to fire it off. He wanted first to make sure of the *whole* of the subject that was unrolling itself before him; after which the innumerable facts he had collected would find their use. He knew what he was about—trust him at last therefore to make, and to some effect, his

big noise. And Mrs. Assingham had repeated that he knew what he was about. It was the happy form of this assurance that had remained with Maggie; it could always come in for her that Amerigo knew what he was about. He might at moments seem vague, seem absent, seem even bored: this when, away from her father, with whom it was impossible for him to appear anything but respectfully occupied, he let his native gaiety go in outbreaks of song, or even of quite whimsical senseless sound, either expressive of intimate relaxation or else fantastically plaintive. He might at times reflect with the frankest lucidity on the circumstance that the case was for a good while yet absolutely settled in regard to what he still had left, at home, of his very own; in regard to the main seat of his affection, the house in Rome, the big black palace, the Palazzo Nero, as he was fond of naming it, and also on the question of the villa in the Sabine hills, which she had at the time of their engagement seen and yearned over, and the Castello proper, described by him always as the "perched" place, that had, as she knew, formerly stood up, on the pedestal of its mountain-slope, showing beautifully blue from afar, as the head and front of the princedom. He might rejoice in certain moods over the so long-estranged state of these properties, not indeed all irreclaimably alienated, but encumbered with unending leases and charges, with obstinate occupants, with impossibilities of use—all without counting the cloud of mortgages that had from far back buried them beneath the ashes of rage and remorse, a shroud as thick as the layer once resting on the towns at the foot of Vesuvius, and actually making of any present restorative effort a process much akin to slow excavation. Just so he might with another turn of his humour almost wail for these brightest spots of his lost paradise, declaring

that he was an idiot not to be able to bring himself to face the sacrifices—sacrifices resting, if definitely anywhere, with Mr. Verver—involved in winning them back.

One of the most comfortable things between the husband and the wife meanwhile—one of those easy certitudes they could be merely gay about—was that she never admired him so much, or so found him heart-breakingly handsome, clever, irresistible, in the very degree in which he had originally and fatally dawned upon her, as when she saw other women reduced to the same passive pulp that had then begun, once for all, to constitute *her* substance. There was really nothing they had talked of together with more intimate and familiar pleasantry than of the license and privilege, the boundless happy margin, thus established for each : she going so far as to put it that, even should he some day get drunk and beat her, the spectacle of him with hated rivals would, after no matter what extremity, always, for the sovereign charm of it, charm of it in itself and as the exhibition of him that most deeply moved her, suffice to bring her round. What would therefore be more open to him than to keep her in love with him ? He agreed, with all his heart, at these light moments, that his course wouldn't then be difficult, inasmuch as, so simply constituted as he was on all the precious question—and why should he be ashamed of it ?—he knew but one way with the fair. They had to be fair—and he was fastidious and particular, his standard was high ; but when once this was the case what relation with them was conceivable, what relation was decent, rudimentary, properly human, but that of a plain interest in the fairness ? His interest, she always answered, happened not to be " plain," and plainness, all round, had little to do with the matter, which was marked on the contrary

by the richest variety of colour ; but the working basis at all events had been settled—the Miss Maddocks of life been assured of their importance for him. How conveniently assured Maggie—to take him too into the joke—had more than once gone so far as to mention to her father ; since it fell in easily with the tenderness of her disposition to remember she might occasionally make him happy by an intimate confidence. This was one of her rules—full as she was of little rules, considerations, provisions. There were things she of course couldn't tell him, in so many words, about Amerigo and herself, and about their happiness and their union and their deepest depths—and there were other things she needn't ; but there were also those that were both true and amusing, both communicable and real, and of these, with her so conscious, so delicately-cultivated scheme of conduct as a daughter, she could make her profit at will.

A pleasant hush, for that matter, had fallen on most of the elements while she lingered apart with her companion ; it involved, this serenity, innumerable complete assumptions : since so ordered and so splendid a rest, all the tokens, spreading about them, of confidence solidly supported, might have suggested for persons of poorer pitch the very insolence of facility. Still, they weren't insolent—*they* weren't, our pair could reflect ; they were only blissful and grateful and personally modest, not ashamed of knowing, with competence, when great things were great, when good things were good, and when safe things were safe, and not therefore placed below their fortune by timidity—which would have been as bad as being below it by impudence. Worthy of it as they were, and as each appears, under our last possible analysis, to have wished to make the other feel that they were, what they most finally exhaled into the

evening air as their eyes mildly met may well have been a kind of helplessness in their felicity. Their rightness, the justification of everything—something they so felt the pulse of—sat there with them; but they might have been asking themselves a little blankly to what further use they could put anything so perfect. They had created and nursed and established it; they had housed it here in dignity and crowned it with comfort; but mightn't the moment possibly count for them—or count at least for us while we watch them with their fate all before them—as the dawn of the discovery that it doesn't always meet *all* contingencies to be right? Otherwise why should Maggie have found a word of definite doubt—the expression of the fine pang determined in her a few hours before—rise after a time to her lips? She took so for granted moreover her companion's intelligence of her doubt that the mere vagueness of her question could say it all. "What is it after all that they want to do to you?" "They" were for the Princess too the hovering forces of which Mrs. Rance was the symbol, and her father, only smiling back now, at his ease, took no trouble to appear not to know what she meant. What she meant—when once she had spoken—could come out well enough; though indeed it was nothing, after they had come to the point, that could serve as ground for a great defensive campaign. The waters of talk spread a little, and Maggie presently contributed an idea in saying: "What has really happened is that the proportions, for us, are altered." He accepted equally for the time this somewhat cryptic remark; he still failed to challenge her even when she added that it wouldn't so much matter if he hadn't been so terribly young. He uttered a sound of protest only when she went on to declare that she ought as a daughter, in common decency, to have waited.

Yet by that time she was already herself admitting that she should have had to wait long—if she waited, that is, till he was old. But there was a way. "Since you *are* an irresistible youth we've got to face it. That's somehow what that woman has made me feel. There'll be others."

IV

To talk of it thus appeared at last a positive relief to him. "Yes, there'll be others. But you'll see me through."

She hesitated. "Do you mean if you give in?"

"Oh no. Through my holding out."

Maggie waited again, but when she spoke it had an effect of abruptness. "Why *should* you hold out for ever?"

He gave, none the less, no start—and this as from the habit of taking anything, taking everything, from her as harmonious. But it was quite written upon him too, for that matter, that holding out wouldn't be so very completely his natural or at any rate his acquired form. His appearance would have testified that he might have to do so a long time—for a man so greatly beset. This appearance, that is, spoke but little, as yet, of short remainders and simplified senses—and all in spite of his being a small spare slightly stale person, deprived of the general prerogative of presence. It wasn't by mass or weight or vulgar immediate quantity that he would in the future, any more than he had done in the past, insist or resist or prevail. There was even something in him that made his position, on any occasion, made his relation to any scene or to any group, a matter of the back of the stage, of an almost visibly conscious want of affinity with the footlights. He would have figured less than anything the stage-

manager or the author of the play, who most occupy the foreground ; he might be at the best the financial "backer," watching his interests from the wing, but in rather confessed ignorance of the mysteries of mimicry. Barely taller than his daughter, he pressed at no point on the presumed propriety of his greater stoutness. He had lost early in life much of his crisp closely-curling hair, the fineness of which was repeated in a small neat beard, too compact to be called "full," though worn equally, as for a mark where other marks were wanting, on lip and cheek and chin. His neat colourless face, provided with the merely indispensable features, suggested immediately, for a description, that it was *clear*, and in this manner somewhat resembled a small decent room, clean-swept and unencumbered with furniture, but drawing a particular advantage, as might presently be noted, from the outlook of a pair of ample and uncurtained windows. There was something in Adam Verver's eyes that both admitted the morning and the evening in unusual quantities and gave the modest area the outward extension of a view that was "big" even when restricted to the stars. Deeply and changeably blue, though not romantically large, they were yet youthfully, almost strangely beautiful, with their ambiguity of your scarce knowing if they most carried their possessor's vision out or most opened themselves to your own. Whatever you might feel, they stamped the place with their importance, as the house-agents say ; so that on one side or the other you were never out of their range, were moving about, for possible community, opportunity, the sight of you scarce knew what, either before them or behind them. If other importances, not to extend the question, kept themselves down, they were in no direction less obtruded than in that of our friend's dress, adopted once for all as with a sort of sumptuary

scruple. He wore every day of the year, whatever the occasion, the same little black "cutaway" coat, of the fashion of his younger time; he wore the same cool-looking trousers, chequered in black and white—the proper harmony with which, he inveterately considered, was a white-dotted blue satin neck-tie; and, over his concave little stomach, quaintly indifferent to climates and seasons, a white duck waistcoat. "Should you really," he now asked, "like me to marry?" He spoke as if, coming from his daughter herself, it *might* be an idea; which for that matter he would be ready to carry right straight out should she definitely say so.

Definite, however, just yet, she was not prepared to be, though it seemed to come to her with force, as she thought, that there was a truth in the connexion to utter. "What I feel is that there's somehow something that used to be right and that I've made wrong. It used to be right that you hadn't married and that you didn't seem to want to. It used also"—she continued to make out—"to seem easy for the question not to come up. That's what I've made different. It does come up. It *will* come up."

"You don't think I can keep it down?" Mr. Verver's tone was cheerfully pensive.

"Well, I've given you by *my* move all the trouble of having to."

He liked the tenderness of her idea, and it made him, as she sat near him, pass his arm about her. "I guess I don't feel as if you had 'moved' very far. You've only moved next door."

"Well," she continued, "I don't feel as if it were fair for me just to have given you a push and left you so. If I've made the difference for you I must think of the difference."

"Then what, darling," he indulgently asked, "*do* you think?"

"That's just what I don't yet know. But I must find out. We must think together—as we've always thought. What I mean," she went on after a moment, "is that it strikes me I ought to at least offer you some alternative. I ought to have worked one out for you."

"An alternative to what?"

"Well, to your simply missing what you've lost—without anything being done about it."

"But what *have* I lost?"

She thought a minute, as if it were difficult to say, yet as if she more and more saw it. "Well, whatever it was that *before* kept us from thinking, and kept *you*, really, as you might say, in the market. It was as if you couldn't be in the market when you were married to *me*. Or rather as if I kept people off, innocently, by being married to you. Now that I'm married to some one else you're, as in consequence, married to nobody. Therefore you may be married to anybody, to everybody. People don't see why you shouldn't be married to *them*."

"Isn't it enough of a reason," he mildly inquired, "that I don't want to be?"

"It's enough of a reason, yes. But to *be* enough of a reason it has to be too much of a trouble. I mean *for* you. It has to be too much of a fight. You ask me what you've lost," Maggie continued to explain. "The not having to take the trouble and to make the fight—that's what you've lost. The advantage, the happiness of being just as you were—because I was just as *I* was—that's what you miss."

"So that you think," her father presently said, "that I had better get married just in order to be as I was before?"

The detached tone of it—detached as if innocently to amuse her by showing his desire to accommodate—was so far successful as to draw from her gravity a short light laugh. "Well, what I don't want you to

feel is that if you were to I shouldn't understand. I *should* understand. That's all," said the Princess gently.

Her companion turned it pleasantly over. "You don't go so far as to wish me to take somebody I don't like?"

"Ah father," she sighed, "you know how far I go —how far I *could* go. But I only wish that if you ever should like anybody you may never doubt of my feeling how I've brought you to it. You'll always know that I know it's my fault."

"You mean," he went on in his contemplative way, "that it will be you who'll take the consequences?"

Maggie just considered. "I'll leave you all the good ones, but I'll take the bad."

"Well, that's handsome." He emphasised his sense of it by drawing her closer and holding her more tenderly. "It's about all I could expect of you. So far as you've wronged me therefore we'll call it square. I'll let you know in time if I see a prospect of your having to take it up. But am I to understand meanwhile," he soon went on, "that, ready as you are to see me through my collapse, you're not ready, or not *so* ready, to see me through my resistance? I've got to be a regular martyr before you'll be inspired?"

She demurred at his way of putting it. "Why if you like it, you know, it won't *be* a collapse."

"Then why talk about seeing me through at all? I shall only collapse if I do like it. But what I seem to feel is that I don't *want* to like it. That is," he amended, "unless I feel surer I do than appears very probable. I don't want to have to think I like it in a case when I really shan't. I've had to do that in some cases," he confessed—"when it has been a question of other things. I don't want," he wound up, "to be *made* to make a mistake."

"Ah but it's too dreadful," she returned, "that you should even have to *fear*—or just nervously to dream—that you may be. What does that show, after all," she asked, "but that you do really, well within, feel a want? What does it show but that you're truly susceptible?"

"Well, it may show that"—he defended himself against nothing. "But it shows also, I think, that charming women are, in the kind of life we're leading now, numerous and formidable."

Maggie entertained for a moment the proposition; under cover of which, however, she passed quickly from the general to the particular. "Do you feel Mrs. Rance to be charming?"

"Well, I feel her to be formidable. When they cast a spell it comes to the same thing. I think she'd do anything."

"Oh well, I'd help you," the Princess said with decision, "as against *her*—if that's all you require. It's too funny," she went on before he again spoke, "that Mrs. Rance should be here at all. But if you talk of the life we lead much of it's altogether, I'm bound to say, too funny. The thing is," Maggie developed under this impression, "that I don't think we lead, as regards other people, any life at all. We don't at any rate, it seems to me, lead half the life we might. And so it seems, I think, to Amerigo. So it seems also, I'm sure, to Fanny Assingham."

Mr. Verver—as if from due regard for these persons—considered a little. "What life would they like us to lead?"

"Oh it's not a question, I think, on which they quite feel together. *She* thinks, dear Fanny, that we ought to be greater."

"Greater——?" He echoed it vaguely. "And Amerigo too, you say?"

"Ah yes"—her reply was prompt—"but Amerigo

doesn't mind. He doesn't care, I mean, what we do. It's for us, he considers, to see things exactly as we wish. Fanny herself," Maggie pursued, "thinks he's magnificent. Magnificent, I mean, for taking everything as it is, for accepting the 'social limitations' of our life, for not missing what we don't give him."

Mr. Verver attended. "Then if he doesn't miss it his magnificence is easy."

"It *is* easy—that's exactly what I think. If there were things he *did* miss, and if in spite of them he were always sweet, then, no doubt, he would be a more or less unappreciated hero. He *could* be a hero—he *will* be one if it's ever necessary. But it will be about something better than our dreariness. *I* know," the Princess declared, "where he's magnificent." And she rested a minute on that. She ended, however, as she had begun. "We're not, all the same, *committed* to anything stupid. If we ought to be grander, as Fanny thinks, we *can* be grander. There's nothing to prevent."

"Is it a strict moral obligation?" Adam Verver inquired.

"No—it's for the amusement."

"For whose? For Fanny's own?"

"For every one's — though I daresay Fanny's would be a large part." She paused; she had now, it might have appeared, something more to bring out, which she finally produced. "For yours in particular, say—if you go into the question." She even bravely followed it up. "I haven't really, after all, had to think much to see that much more can be done for you than is done."

Mr. Verver uttered an odd vague sound. "Don't you think a good deal's done when you come out and talk to me this way?"

"Ah," said his daughter, smiling at him, "we make too much of that!" And then to explain: "That's

good, and it's natural—but it isn't great. We forget that we're as free as air."

"Well, *that's* great," Mr. Verver pleaded.

"Great if we act on it. Not if we don't."

She continued to smile, and he took her smile; wondering again a little by this time, however; struck more and more by an intensity in it that belied a light tone. "What do you want," he demanded, "to do to me?" And he added, as she didn't say, "You've got something in your mind." It had come to him within the minute that from the beginning of their session there she had been keeping something back, and that an impression of this had more than once, in spite of his general theoretic respect for her present right to personal reserves and mysteries, almost ceased to be vague in him. There had been from the first something in her anxious eyes, in the way she occasionally lost herself, that it would perfectly explain. He was therefore now quite sure. "You've got something up your sleeve."

She had a silence that made him right. "Well, when I tell you you'll understand. It's only up my sleeve in the sense of being in a letter I got this morning. All day, yes—it *has* been in my mind. I've been asking myself if it were quite the right moment, or in any way fair, to ask *you* if you could stand just now another woman."

It relieved him a little, yet the beautiful consideration of her manner made it in a degree portentous. "'Stand' one——?"

"Well, mind her coming."

He stared—then he laughed. "It depends on who she is."

"There—you see! I've at all events been thinking whether you'd take this particular person but as a worry the more. Whether, that is, you'd go so far with her in your notion of having to be kind."

He gave at this the quickest shake to his foot. "How far would she go in *her* notion of it?"

"Well," his daughter returned, "you know how far, in a general way, Charlotte Stant goes."

"Charlotte? Is *she* coming?"

"She writes me, practically, that she'd like to if we're so good as to ask her."

Mr. Verver continued to gaze, but rather as if waiting for more. Then as everything appeared to have come his expression had a drop. If this was all it was simple. "Then why in the world not?"

Maggie's face lighted anew, but it was now another light. "It isn't a want of tact?"

"To ask her?"

"To propose it to you."

"That *I* should ask her?"

He put the question as an effect of his remnant of vagueness, but this had also its own effect. Maggie wondered an instant; after which, as with a flush of recognition, she took it up. "It would be too beautiful if you *would*!"

This, clearly, had not been her first idea — the chance of his words had prompted it. "Do you mean write to her myself?"

"Yes—it would be kind. It would be quite beautiful of you. That is of course," said Maggie, "if you sincerely *can*."

He appeared to wonder an instant why he sincerely shouldn't, and indeed, for that matter, where the question of sincerity came in. This virtue between him and his daughter's friend had surely been taken for granted. "My dear child," he returned, "I don't think I'm afraid of Charlotte."

"Well, that's just what it's lovely to have from you. From the moment you're *not*—the least little bit—I'll immediately invite her."

"But where in the world is she?" He spoke as

if he hadn't thought of Charlotte, nor so much as heard her name pronounced, for a very long time. He quite in fact amicably, almost amusedly, woke up to her.

"She's in Brittany, at a little bathing-place, with some people I don't know. She's always with people, poor dear—she rather has to be; even when, as is sometimes the case, they're people she doesn't immensely like."

"Well, I guess she likes *us*," said Adam Verver.

"Yes—fortunately she likes us. And if I wasn't afraid of spoiling it for you," Maggie added, "I'd even mention that you're not the one of our number she likes least."

"Why should that spoil it for me?"

"Oh my dear, you know. What else have we been talking about? It costs you so much to be liked. That's why I hesitated to tell you of my letter."

He stared a moment—as if the subject had suddenly grown out of recognition. "But Charlotte—on other visits—never used to cost me anything."

"No—only her 'keep,'" Maggie smiled.

"Then I don't think I mind her keep—if that's all."

The Princess, however, it was clear, wished to be thoroughly conscientious. "Well, it may not be quite all. If I think of its being pleasant to have her, it's because she *will* make a difference."

"Well, what's the harm in that if it's but a difference for the better?"

"Ah then—there you are!" And the Princess showed in her smile her small triumphant wisdom. "If you acknowledge a possible difference for the better we're not, after all, so tremendously right as we are. I mean we're not—as a family—so intensely satisfied and amused. We do see there are ways of being grander."

"But will Charlotte Stant," her father asked with surprise, "make us grander?"

Maggie, on this, looking at him well, had a remarkable reply. "Yes, I think. Really grander."

He thought; for if here was a sudden opening he wished but the more to meet it. "Because she's so handsome?"

"No, father." And the Princess was almost solemn. "Because she's so great."

"'Great'——?"

"Great in nature, in character, in spirit. Great in life."

"So?" Mr. Verver echoed. "What has she done—in life?"

"Well, she has been brave and bright," said Maggie. "That mayn't sound like much, but she has been so in the face of things that might well have made it too difficult for many other girls. She hasn't a creature in the world really—that is nearly—belonging to her. Only acquaintances who, in all sorts of ways, make use of her, and distant relations who are so afraid she'll make use of *them* that they seldom let her look at them."

Mr. Verver was struck—and, as usual, to some purpose. "If we get her here to improve *us* don't we too then make use of her?"

It pulled the Princess up, however, but an instant. "We're old, old friends—we do her good too. I should always, even at the worst—speaking for myself—admire her still more than I used her."

"I see. That always does good."

Maggie seemed to consider his way of putting it. "Certainly then—she knows it. She knows, I mean, how great I think her courage and her cleverness. She's not afraid—not of anything; and yet she no more ever takes a liberty with you than if she trembled for her life. And then she's *interesting*—which

plenty of other people with plenty of other merits never are a bit." In which fine flicker of vision the truth widened to the Princess's view. "I myself of course don't take liberties, but then I do always by nature tremble for my life. That's the way I live."

"Oh I say, love!" her father vaguely murmured.

"Yes, I live in terror," she insisted. "I'm a small creeping thing."

"You'll not persuade me that you're not so good as Charlotte Stant," he still placidly enough remarked.

"I may be as good, but I'm not so great—and that's what we're talking about. She has a great imagination. She has, in every way, a great attitude. She has above all a great conscience." More perhaps than ever in her life before Maggie addressed her father at this moment with a shade of the absolute in her tone. She had never come so near telling him what he should take it from her to believe. "She has only twopence in the world—but that has nothing to do with it. Or rather indeed"—she quickly corrected herself—"it has everything. For she doesn't care. I never saw her do anything but laugh at her poverty. Her life has been harder than any one knows."

It was moreover as if, thus unprecedentedly positive, his child had an effect upon him that Mr. Verver really felt as a new thing. "Why then haven't you told me about her before?"

"Well, haven't we always known——?"

"I should have thought," he submitted, "that we had already pretty well sized her up."

"Certainly — we long ago quite took her for granted. But things change with time, and I seem to know that after this interval I'm going to like her better than ever. I've lived more myself, I'm older, and one judges better. Yes, I'm going to see in

Charlotte," said the Princess—and speaking now as with high and free expectation—" more than I've ever seen."

" Then I'll try to do so too. She *was* "—it came back to Mr. Verver more—" the one of your friends I thought the best for you."

His companion, however, was so launched in her permitted liberty of appreciation that she for the moment scarce heard him. She was lost in the case she made out, the vision of the different ways in which Charlotte had distinguished herself. " She'd have liked for instance—I'm sure she'd have liked extremely —to marry ; and nothing in general is more ridiculous, even when it has been pathetic, than a woman who has tried and hasn't been able."

It had all Mr. Verver's attention. " She has 'tried '——?"

" She has seen cases where she would have liked to."

" But she hasn't been able ? "

" Well, there are more cases, in Europe, in which it doesn't come to girls who are poor than in which it does come to them. Especially," said Maggie with her continued competence, " when they're Americans."

Well, her father now met her, and met her cheerfully, on all sides. " Unless you mean," he suggested, " that when the girls are American there are more cases in which it comes to the rich than to the poor."

She looked at him good-humouredly. " That may be—but I'm not going to be smothered in *my* case. It ought to make me—if I were in danger of being a fool—all the nicer to people like Charlotte. It's not hard for *me*," she shrewdly explained, " not to be ridiculous—unless in a very different way. I might easily be ridiculous, I suppose, by behaving as if I thought I had done a great thing. Charlotte at any

rate has done nothing, and any one can see it, and see also that it's rather strange ; and yet no one—no one not awfully presumptuous or offensive—would like, or would dare, to treat her, just as she is, as anything but quite *right*. That's what it is to have something about you that carries things off."

Mr. Verver's silence on this could only be a sign that she had caused her story to interest him ; though the sign when he spoke was perhaps even sharper. " And is it also what you mean by Charlotte's being ' great ' ? "

" Well," said Maggie, " it's one of her ways. But she has many."

Again for a little her father considered. " And who is it she has tried to marry ? "

Maggie, on her side as well, waited as if to bring it out with effect ; but she after a minute either renounced or encountered an obstacle. " I'm afraid I'm not sure."

" Then how do you know ? "

" Well, I don't *know* "—and, qualifying again, she was earnestly emphatic. " I only make it out for myself."

" But you must make it out about some one in particular."

She had another pause. " I don't think I want even for myself to put names and times, to pull away any veil. I've an idea there has been, more than once, somebody I'm not acquainted with—and needn't be or want to be. In any case it's all over, and, beyond giving her credit for everything, it's none of my business."

Mr. Verver deferred, yet he discriminated. " I don't see how you can give credit without knowing the facts."

" Can't I give it—generally—for dignity ? Dignity, I mean, in misfortune."

"You've got to postulate the misfortune first."

"Well," said Maggie, "I can do that. Isn't it always a misfortune to be—when you're so fine—so wasted? And yet," she went on, "not to wail about it, not to look even as if you knew it?"

Mr. Verver seemed at first to face this as a large question, and then, after a little, solicited by another view, to let the appeal drop. "Well, she mustn't be wasted. We won't at least have waste."

It produced in Maggie's face another gratitude. "Then, dear sir, that's all I want."

And it would apparently have settled their question and ended their talk if her father hadn't, after a little, shown the disposition to revert. "How many times are you supposing she has tried?"

Once more, at this, and as if she hadn't been, couldn't be, hated to be, in such delicate matters, literal, she was moved to attenuate. "Oh I don't say she absolutely ever tried——!"

He looked perplexed. "But if she has so absolutely failed, what then has she done?"

"She has suffered—she has done *that*." And the Princess added: "She has loved—and she has lost."

Mr. Verver, however, still wondered. "But how many times?"

Maggie hesitated, but it cleared up. "Once is enough. Enough, that is, for one to be kind to her."

Her father listened, yet not challenging -only as with a need of some basis on which, under these new lights, his bounty could be firm. "But has she told you nothing?"

"Ah thank goodness, no!"

He stared. "Then don't young women tell?"

"Because, you mean, it's just what they're supposed to do?" She looked at him, flushed again

now; with which, after another hesitation. "Do young men tell?" she asked.

He gave a short laugh. "How do I know, my dear, what young men do?"

"Then how do *I* know, father, what vulgar girls do?"

"I see—I see," he quickly returned.

But she spoke the next moment as if she might, odiously, have been sharp. "What happens at least is that where there's a great deal of pride there's a great deal of silence. I don't know, I admit, what *I* should do if I were lonely and sore—for what sorrow, to speak of, have I ever had in my life? I don't know even if I'm proud—it seems to me the question has never come up for me."

"Oh I guess you're proud, Mag," her father cheerfully interposed. "I mean I guess you're proud enough."

"Well then I hope I'm humble enough too. I might at all events, for all I know, be abject under a blow. How can I tell? Do you realise, father, that I've never had the least blow?"

He gave her a long quiet look. "Who *should* realise if I don't?"

"Well, you'll realise when I *have* one!" she exclaimed with a short laugh that resembled, as for good reasons, his own of a minute before. "I wouldn't in any case have let her tell me what would have been dreadful to me. For such wounds and shames *are* dreadful: at least," she added, catching herself up, "I suppose they are; for what, as I say, do I know of them? I don't *want* to know!"—she spoke quite with vehemence. "There are things that are sacred—whether they're joys or pains. But one can always, for safety, be kind," she kept on; "one feels when that's right."

She had got up with these last words; she stood there before him with that particular suggestion in

her aspect to which even the long habit of their life together hadn't closed his sense, kept sharp, year after year, by the collation of types and signs, the comparison of fine object with fine object, of one degree of finish, of one form of the exquisite with another—the appearance of some slight slim draped "antique" of Vatican or Capitoline halls, late and refined, rare as a note and immortal as a link, set in motion by the miraculous infusion of a modern impulse and yet, for all the sudden freedom of folds and footsteps forsaken after centuries by their pedestal, keeping still the quality, the perfect felicity, of the statue; the blurred absent eyes, the smoothed elegant nameless head, the impersonal flit of a creature lost in an alien age and passing as an image in worn relief round and round a precious vase. She had always had odd moments of striking him, daughter of his very own though she was, as a figure thus simplified, "generalised" in its grace, a figure with which his human connexion was fairly interrupted by some vague analogy of turn and attitude, something shyly mythological and nymph-like. The trick, he wasn't uncomplacently aware, was mainly of his own mind; it came from his caring for precious vases only less than for precious daughters. And what was more to the point still, it often operated while he was quite at the same time conscious that Maggie had been described, even in her prettiness, as "prim"—Mrs. Rance herself had enthusiastically used the word for her; while he remembered that when once she had been told before him familiarly that she resembled a nun she had replied that she was delighted to hear it and would certainly try to; while also, finally, it was present to him that, discreetly heedless, through her long association with nobleness in art, to the leaps and bounds of fashion, she brought her hair down very straight and flat over her temples, in the

constant manner of her mother, who hadn't been a bit mythological. Nymphs and nuns were certainly separate types, but Mr. Verver, when he really amused himself, let consistency go. The play of vision was at all events so rooted in him that he could receive impressions of sense even while positively thinking. He was positively thinking while Maggie stood there, and it led for him to yet another question—which in its turn led to others still. "Do you regard the condition as hers then that you spoke of a minute ago?"

"The condition——?"

"Why that of having loved so intensely that she's, as you say, 'beyond everything'?"

Maggie had scarcely to reflect— her answer was so prompt. "Oh no. She's beyond nothing. For she has had nothing."

"I see. You must have had things to be beyond them. It's a kind of law of perspective."

Maggie didn't know about the law, but continued definite. "She's not, for example, beyond help."

"Oh well then she shall have all we can give her. I'll write to her," he said, "with pleasure."

"Angel!" she answered as she gaily and tenderly looked at him.

True as this might be, however, there was one thing more- he was an angel with a human curiosity. "Has she told you she likes me much?"

"Certainly she has told me—but I won't pamper you. Let it be enough for you it has always been one of my reasons for liking *her*."

"Then she's indeed not beyond everything," Mr. Verver more or less humorously observed.

"Oh it isn't, thank goodness, that she's in love with you. It's not, as I told you at first, the sort of thing for you to fear."

He had spoken with cheer, but it appeared to drop before this reassurance, as if the latter overdid his alarm, and that should be corrected. "Oh my dear, I've always thought of her as a little girl."

"Ah she's not a little girl," said the Princess.

"Then I'll write to her as a brilliant woman."

"It's exactly what she is."

Mr. Verver had got up as he spoke, and for a little, before retracing their steps, they stood looking at each other as if they had really arranged something. They had come out together for themselves, but it had produced something more. What it had produced was in fact expressed by the words with which he met his companion's last emphasis. "Well, she has a famous friend in you, Princess."

Maggie took this in—it was too plain for a protest. "Do you know what I'm really thinking of?" she asked.

He wondered, with her eyes on him — eyes of contentment at her freedom now to talk; and he wasn't such a fool, he presently showed, as not, suddenly, to arrive at it. "Why of your finding her at last yourself a husband."

"Good for *you*!" Maggie smiled. "But it will take," she added, "some looking."

"Then let me look right here with you," her father said as they walked on.

V

Mrs. Assingham and the Colonel, quitting Fawns before the end of September, had come back later on; and now, a couple of weeks after, they were again interrupting their stay, but this time with the question of their return left to depend on matters that were rather hinted at than importunately named. The Lutches and Mrs. Rance had also, by the action of Charlotte Stant's arrival, ceased to linger, though with hopes and theories, as to some promptitude of renewal, of which the lively expression, awaking the echoes of the great stone-paved, oak-panelled, galleried hall that was not the least interesting feature of the place, seemed still a property of the air. It was on this admirable spot that, before her October afternoon had waned, Fanny Assingham spent with her easy host a few moments which led to her announcing her own and her husband's final secession, at the same time as they tempted her to point the moral of all vain reverberations. The double door of the house stood open to an effect of hazy autumn sunshine, a wonderful windless waiting golden hour under the influence of which Adam Verver met his genial friend as she came to drop into the post-box with her own hand a thick sheaf of letters. They presently thereafter left the house together and drew out half an hour on the terrace in a manner they were to revert to in thought, later on, as that of persons

who really had been taking leave of each other at a parting of the ways. He traced his impression, on coming to consider, back to a mere three words she had begun by using about Charlotte Stant. Charlotte simply "cleared them out"—those had been the three words, thrown off in reference to the general golden peace that the Kentish October had gradually ushered in, the "halcyon" days the full beauty of which had appeared to shine out for them after that young lady's arrival. For it was during these days that Mrs. Rance and the Miss Lutches had been observed to be gathering themselves for departure, and it was with that difference made that the sense of the whole situation showed most fair—the sense of how right they had been to engage for so ample a residence, and of all the pleasure so fruity an autumn there could hold in its lap. This was what had occurred, that their lesson had been learned; and what Mrs. Assingham had dwelt upon was that without Charlotte it would have been learned but half. It would certainly not have been taught by Mrs. Rance and the Miss Lutches if these ladies had remained with them as long as at one time seemed probable. Charlotte's light intervention had thus become a cause, operating covertly but none the less actively, and Fanny Assingham's speech, which she had followed up a little, echoed within him, fairly to startle him, as the indication of something irresistible. He could see now how this superior force had worked, and he fairly liked to recover the sight—little harm as he dreamed of doing, little ill as he dreamed of wishing, the three ladies, whom he had after all entertained for a stiffish series of days. She had been so vague and quiet about it, wonderful Charlotte, that he hadn't known what was happening—happening, that is, as a result of her influence. "Their fires, as they felt her, turned to smoke," Mrs. Assing-

ham remarked; which he was to reflect on indeed even while they strolled. He had retained, since his long talk with Maggie—the talk that had settled the matter of his own direct invitation to her friend—an odd little taste, as he would have described it, for hearing things said about this young woman, hearing, so to speak, what *could* be said about her: almost as if her portrait, by some eminent hand, were going on, so that he watched it grow under the multiplication of touches. Mrs. Assingham, it struck him, applied two or three of the finest in their discussion of their young friend—so different a figure now from that early playmate of Maggie's as to whom he could almost recall from of old the definite occasions of his having paternally lumped the two children together in the recommendation that they shouldn't make too much noise nor eat too much jam. His companion professed that in the light of Charlotte's prompt influence she hadn't been a stranger to a pang of pity for their recent visitors. "I felt in fact privately so sorry for them that I kept my impression to myself while they were here—wishing not to put the rest of you on the scent; neither Maggie, nor the Prince, nor yourself, nor even Charlotte *her*self, if you didn't happen to notice. Since you didn't, apparently, I perhaps now strike you as extravagant. But I'm not—I followed it all. One *saw* the consciousness I speak of come over the poor things, very much as I suppose people at the court of the Borgias may have watched each other begin to look queer after having had the honour of taking wine with the heads of the family. My comparison's only a little awkward, for I don't in the least mean that Charlotte was consciously dropping poison into their cup. She was just herself their poison, in the sense of mortally disagreeing with them—but she didn't know it."

"Ah she didn't know it?" Mr. Verver had asked with interest.

"Well, I *think* she didn't"—Mrs. Assingham had to admit that she hadn't pressingly sounded her. "I don't pretend to be sure in every connexion of what Charlotte knows. She doesn't certainly like to make people suffer—not, in general, as is the case with so many of us, even other women: she likes much rather to put them at their ease with her. She likes, that is—as all pleasant people do—to be liked."

"Ah she likes to be liked?" her companion had gone on.

"She did at the same time, no doubt, want to help us—to put *us* at our ease. That is she wanted to put you—and to put Maggie about you. So far as that went she had a plan. But it was only *after*—it was not before, I really believe—that she saw how effectively she could work."

Again, as Mr. Verver felt, he must have taken it up. "Ah she wanted to help us?—wanted to help *me*?"

"Why," Mrs. Assingham asked after an instant, "should it surprise you?"

He just thought. "Oh it doesn't!"

"She saw of course as soon as she came, with her quickness, where we all were. She didn't need each of us to go by appointment to her room at night, or to take her out into the fields, for our palpitating tale. No doubt even she was rather impatient."

"*Of* the poor things?" Mr. Verver had here inquired while he waited.

"Well, of your not yourselves being so—and of *your* not in particular. I haven't the least doubt in the world, *par exemple*, that she thinks you too meek."

"Oh she thinks me too meek?"

"And she had been sent for, on the very face of it,

to work right in. All she had to do after all was to be nice to you."

"To—a—*me*?" said Adam Verver.

He could remember now that his friend had positively had a laugh for his tone. "To you and to every one. She had only to be what she is—and to be it all round. If she's charming, how can she help it? So it was, and so only, that she 'acted'—as the Borgia wine used to act. One saw it come over them—the extent to which, in her particular way, a woman, a woman other, and *so* other, than themselves, *could* be charming. One saw them understand and exchange looks, then one saw them lose heart and decide to move. For what they had to take home was that it's she who's the real thing."

"Ah it's she who's the real thing?" As *he* hadn't hitherto taken it home as completely as the Miss Lutches and Mrs. Rance, so doubtless he had now a little appeared to offer submission in his appeal. "I see, I see"—he could at least simply take it home now; yet as not without wanting at the same time to be sure of what the real thing was. "And what would it be—a—definitely that you understand by that?"

She had only for an instant not found it easy to say. "Why exactly what those women themselves want to be, and what her effect on them is to make them recognise that they never will."

"Oh—of course never!"

It not only remained with them and hung about them, it positively developed and deepened, after this talk, that the luxurious side of his personal existence was now again furnished, socially speaking, with the thing classed and stamped as "real"—just as he had been able to think of it as not otherwise enriched in consequence of his daughter's marriage. The note of reality, in so much projected light, continued to have

for him the charm and the importance of which the maximum had occasionally been reached in his great "finds"; it continued, beyond any other, to keep him attentive and gratified. Nothing perhaps might affect us as queerer, had we time to look into it, than this application of the same measure of value to such different pieces of property as old Persian carpets, say, and new human acquisitions; all the more indeed that the amiable man was not without an inkling on his own side that he was, as a taster of life, economically constructed. He put into his one little glass everything he raised to his lips, and it was as if he had always carried in his pocket, like a tool of his trade, this receptacle, a little glass cut with a fineness of which the art had long since been lost, and kept in an old morocco case stamped in uneffaceable gilt with the arms of a deposed dynasty. As it had served him to satisfy himself, so to speak, both about Amerigo and about the Bernardino Luini he had happened to come to knowledge of at the time he was consenting to the announcement of his daughter's betrothal, so it served him at present to satisfy himself about Charlotte Stant and an extraordinary set of oriental tiles of which he had lately got wind, to which a provoking legend was attached, and as to which he had made out contentedly that further news was to be obtained from a certain Mr. Gutermann-Seuss of Brighton. It was all at bottom in him, the esthetic principle, planted where it could burn with a cold still flame; where it fed almost wholly on the material directly involved, on the idea (followed by appropriation) of plastic beauty, of the thing visibly perfect in its kind; where, in short, despite the general tendency of the "devouring element" to spread, the rest of his spiritual furniture, modest scattered and tended with unconscious care, escaped the consumption that in so many cases proceeds from the undue keeping-up

of profane altar-fires. Adam Verver had in other words learnt the lesson of the senses, to the end of his own little book, without having for a day raised the smallest scandal in his economy at large ; being in this particular not unlike those fortunate bachelors or other gentlemen of pleasure who so manage their entertainment of compromising company that even the austerest housekeeper, occupied and competent below-stairs, never feels obliged to give warning.

That figure has however a freedom for us that the occasion doubtless scarce demands, though we may retain it for its rough negative value. It was to come to pass, by a pressure applied to the situation wholly from within, that before the first ten days of November had elapsed he found himself practically alone at Fawns with his young friend ; Amerigo and Maggie having, with a certain abruptness, invited his assent to their going abroad for a month, since his amusement was now scarce less happily assured than his security. An impulse eminently natural had stirred within the Prince ; his life, as for some time established, was deliciously dull, and thereby on the whole what he best liked ; but a small gust of yearning had swept over him, and Maggie repeated to her father with infinite admiration the pretty terms in which, after it had lasted a little, he had described to her this experience. He called it a " serenade," a low music that, outside one of the windows of the sleeping house, disturbed his rest at night. Timid as it was, and plaintive, he yet couldn't close his eyes for it, and when finally, rising on tiptoe, he had looked out, he had recognised in the figure below with a mandolin, all duskily draped in her grace, the raised appealing eyes and the one irresistible voice of the ever-to-be-loved Italy. Sooner or later, that way, one had to listen ; it was a hovering haunting ghost, as of a

creature to whom one had done a wrong, a dim pathetic shade crying out to be comforted. For this there was obviously but one way—as these were doubtless also many words for the simple fact that so prime a Roman had a fancy for again seeing Rome. They would accordingly—hadn't they better?—go for a little; Maggie meanwhile making the too-absurdly artful point with her father, so that he repeated it in his amusement to Charlotte Stant, to whom he was by this time conscious of addressing many remarks, that it was absolutely, when she came to think, the first thing Amerigo had ever asked of her. "She doesn't count of course his having asked of her to marry him"—this was Mr. Verver's indulgent criticism; but he found Charlotte, equally touched by the ingenuous Maggie, in easy agreement with him over the question. If the Prince had asked something of his wife every day in the year this would be still no reason why the poor dear man shouldn't, in a beautiful fit of homesickness, revisit without reproach his native country.

What his father-in-law frankly counselled was that the reasonable, the really too reasonable pair should, while they were about it, take three or four weeks of Paris as well—Paris being always for Mr. Verver in any stress of sympathy a suggestion that rose of itself to the lips. If they would only do that, on their way back or however they preferred it, Charlotte and he would go over to join them there for a small look—though even then, assuredly, as he had it at heart to add, not in the least because they should have found themselves bored at being left together. The fate of this last proposal indeed was that it reeled for the moment under an assault of destructive analysis from Maggie, who—having, as she granted, to choose between being an unnatural daughter or an unnatural mother, and "electing" for the former—wanted to

know what would become of the Principino if the house were cleared of every one but the servants. Her question had fairly resounded, but it had afterwards, like many of her questions, dropped still more effectively than it had risen: the highest moral of the matter being, before the couple took their departure, that Mrs. Noble and Dr. Brady must mount unchallenged guard over the august little crib. If she hadn't supremely believed in the majestic value of the nurse, whose experience was in itself the amplest of pillows, just as her attention was a spreading canopy from which precedent and reminiscence dropped as thickly as parted curtains—if she hadn't been able to rest in this confidence she would fairly have sent her husband on his journey without her. In the same manner, if the sweetest—for it was so she qualified him—of little country doctors hadn't proved to her his wisdom by rendering irresistible, especially on rainy days and in direct proportion to the frequency of his calls, adapted to all weathers, that she should converse with him for hours over causes and consequences, over what he had found to answer with his little five at home, she would have drawn scant support from the presence of a mere grandfather and a mere brilliant friend. These persons, accordingly, her own predominance having thus for the time given way, could carry with a certain ease, and above all with mutual aid, their consciousness of a charge. So far as their office weighed they could help each other with it—which was in fact to become, as Mrs. Noble herself loomed larger for them, not a little of a relief and a diversion.

Mr. Verver met his young friend, at certain hours, in the day-nursery, very much as he had regularly met the child's fond mother—Charlotte having, as she clearly considered, given Maggie equal pledges and desiring never to fail of the last word for the

daily letter she had promised to write. She wrote with high fidelity, she let her companion know, and the effect of it was, remarkably enough, that he himself didn't write. The reason of this was partly that Charlotte "told all about him"—which she also let him know she did—and partly that he enjoyed feeling, as a consequence, that he was generally, quite systematically, eased and, as they said, "done" for. Committed, as it were, to this charming and clever young woman, who, by becoming for him a domestic resource had become for him practically a new person—and committed especially in his own house, which somehow made his sense of it a deeper thing—he took an interest in seeing how far the connexion could carry him, could perhaps even lead him, and in thus putting to the test, for pleasant verification, what Fanny Assingham had said at the last about the difference such a girl could make. She was really making one now, in their simplified existence, and a very considerable one, though there was no one to compare her with, as there had been so usefully for Fanny—no Mrs. Rance, no Kitty, no Dotty Lutch, to help her to be felt, according to Fanny's diagnosis, as real. She was real, decidedly, from other causes, and Mr. Verver grew in time even a little amused at the amount of machinery Mrs. Assingham had seemed to see needed for pointing it. She was directly and immediately real, real on a pleasantly reduced and intimate scale, and at no moments more so than during those—at which we have just glanced—when Mrs. Noble made them both together feel that she, she alone, in the absence of the queen-mother, was regent of the realm and governess of the heir. Treated on such occasions as at best a pair of dangling and merely nominal court-functionaries, picturesque hereditary triflers entitled to the *petites entrées* but quite external to the State, which began and ended with the Nursery,

they could only retire, in quickened sociability, to what was left them of the Palace, there to digest their gilded insignificance and cultivate, in regard to the true Executive, such snuff-taking ironies as might belong to rococo chamberlains moving among china lap-dogs.

Every evening after dinner Charlotte Stant played to him ; seated at the piano and requiring no music she went through his "favourite things"—and he had many favourites—with a facility that never failed, or that failed but just enough to pick itself up at a touch from his fitful voice. She could play anything, she could play everything—always shockingly, she of course insisted, but always, by his own vague measure, very much as if she might, slim sinuous and strong, and with practised passion, have been playing lawn-tennis or endlessly and rhythmically waltzing. His love of music, unlike his other loves, owned to vaguenesses, but while, on his comparatively shaded sofa, and smoking, smoking, always smoking, in the great Fawns drawing-room as everywhere, the cigars of his youth, rank with associations—while, I say, he so listened to Charlotte's piano, where the score was ever absent but, between the lighted candles, the picture distinct, the vagueness spread itself about him like some boundless carpet, a surface delightfully soft to the pressure of his interest. It was a manner of passing the time that rather replaced conversation, but the air at the end none the less, before they separated, had a way of seeming full of the echoes of talk. They separated, in the hushed house, not quite easily, yet not quite awkwardly either, with tapers that twinkled in the large dark spaces, and for the most part so late that the last solemn servant had been dismissed for the night.

Late as it was on a particular evening toward the end of October, there had been a full word or two

dropped into the still-stirring sea of other voices—a word or two that affected our friend even at the moment, and rather oddly, as louder and rounder than any previous sound ; and then he had lingered, under pretext of an opened window to be made secure, after taking leave of his companion in the hall and watching her glimmer away up the staircase. He had for himself another impulse than to go to bed ; picking up a hat in the hall, slipping his arms into a sleeveless cape and lighting still another cigar, he turned out upon the terrace through one of the long drawing-room windows and moved to and fro there for an hour beneath the sharp autumn stars. It was where he had walked in the afternoon sun with Fanny Assingham, and the sense of that other hour, the sense of the suggestive woman herself, was before him again as, in spite of all the previous degustation we have hinted at, it hadn't yet been. He thought, in a loose, an almost agitated order, of many things ; the power that was in them to agitate having been part of his conviction that he shouldn't soon sleep. He truly felt for a while that he should never sleep again till something had come to him ; some light, some idea, some mere happy word perhaps, that he had begun to want, but had been till now, and especially the last day or two, vainly groping for. " Can you really then come if we start early ? "—that was practically all he had said to the girl as she took up her bedroom light. And " Why in the world not, when I've nothing else to do and should besides so immensely like it ? "—this had as definitely been, on her side, the limit of the little scene. There had in fact been nothing to call a scene, even of the littlest, at all—though he perhaps didn't quite know why something like the menace of one hadn't proceeded from her stopping halfway upstairs to turn and say, as she looked down

on him, that she promised to content herself, for their journey, with a toothbrush and a sponge. There hovered about him at all events, while he walked, appearances already familiar, as well as two or three that were new, and not the least vivid of the former connected itself with that sense of being treated with consideration which had become for him, as we have noted, one of the minor, yet, so far as there were any such, quite one of the compensatory, incidents of being a father-in-law. It had struck him up to now that this particular balm was a mixture of which Amerigo, owing to some hereditary privilege, alone possessed the secret ; so that he found himself wondering if it had come to Charlotte, who had unmistakably acquired it, through the young man's having amiably passed it on. She made use, for her so quietly grateful host, however this might be, of quite the same shades of attention and recognition, was mistress in an equal degree of the regulated, the developed art of placing him high in the scale of importance. That was even for his own thought a clumsy way of expressing the element of similarity in the agreeable effect they each produced on him, and it held him for a little only because this coincidence in their felicity caused him vaguely to connect or associate them in the matter of tradition, training, tact, or whatever else one might call it. It might almost have been—if such a link between them was to be imagined—that Amerigo had a little " coached " or incited their young friend, or perhaps rather that she had simply, as one of the signs of the general perfection Fanny Assingham commended in her, profited by observing, during her short opportunity before the start of the travellers, the pleasant application by the Prince of his personal system. He might wonder what exactly it was that they so resembled each other in treating him *like*—from what noble

and propagated convention, in cases in which the exquisite "importance" was to be neither too grossly attributed nor too grossly denied, they had taken their specific lesson; but the difficulty was here of course that one could really never know—couldn't know without having *been* one's self a personage; whether a Pope, a King, a President, a Peer, a General, or just a beautiful Author.

Before such a question, as before several others when they recurred, he would come to a pause, leaning his arms on the old parapet and losing himself in a far excursion. He had as to so many of the matters in hand a divided view, and this was exactly what made him reach out, in his unrest, for some idea, lurking in the vast freshness of the night, at the breath of which disparities would submit to fusion and so, spreading beneath him, make him feel he floated. What he kept finding himself return to, disturbingly enough, was the reflexion, deeper than anything else, that in forming a new and intimate tie he should in a manner abandon, or at the best signally relegate, his daughter. He should reduce to definite form the idea that he had lost her—as was indeed inevitable—by her own marriage; he should reduce to definite form the idea of his having incurred an injury, or at the best an inconvenience, that required some makeweight and deserved some amends. And he should do this the more, which was the great point, that he should appear to adopt in doing it the sentiment, in fact the very conviction, entertained and quite sufficiently expressed by Maggie herself in her beautiful generosity, as to what he had suffered—putting it with extravagance—at her hands. If she put it with extravagance the extravagance was yet sincere, for it came—which she put with extravagance too—from her persistence always in thinking, feeling, talking about him as young. He had had

glimpses of moments when to hear her thus, in her absolutely unforced compunction, one would have supposed the special edge of the wrong she had done him to consist in his having still before him years and years to groan under it. She had sacrificed a parent, the pearl of parents, no older than herself: it wouldn't so much have mattered if he had been of common parental age. That he wasn't, that he was just her extraordinary equal and contemporary, this was what added to her act the long train of its effect. Light broke for him at last, indeed, quite as a consequence of the fear of breathing a chill upon this luxuriance of her spiritual garden. As at a turn of his labyrinth he saw his issue, which opened out so wide, for the minute, that he held his breath with wonder. He was afterwards to recall how just then the autumn night seemed to clear to a view in which the whole place, everything round him, the wide terrace where he stood, the others, with their steps, below, the gardens, the park, the lake, the circling woods, lay there as under some strange midnight sun. It all met him during these instants as a vast expanse of *discovery*, a world that looked, so lighted, extraordinarily new, and in which familiar objects had taken on a distinctness that, as if it had been a loud, a spoken pretension to beauty, interest, importance, to he scarce knew what, gave them an inordinate quantity of character and verily an inordinate size. The hallucination, or whatever he might have called it, was brief, but it lasted long enough to leave him gasping. The gasp of admiration had by this time however lost itself in an intensity that quickly followed—the way the wonder of it, since wonder was in question, truly had been the strange *delay* of his vision. He had these several days groped and groped for an object that lay at his feet and as to which his blindness came from his stupidly looking

beyond. It had sat all the while at his hearthstone, whence it now gazed up in his face.

Once he had recognised it there everything became coherent. The sharp point to which all his light converged was that the whole call of his future to him as a father would be in his so managing that Maggie would less and less appear to herself to have forsaken him. And it not only wouldn't be decently humane, decently possible, not to make this relief easy to her—the idea shone upon him, more than that, as exciting, inspiring, uplifting. It fell in so beautifully with what might be otherwise possible; it stood there absolutely confronted with the material way in which it might be met. The way in which it might be met was by his putting his child at peace, and the way to put her at peace was to provide for his future — that is for hers — by marriage, by a marriage as good, speaking proportionately, as hers had been. As he fairly inhaled this measure of refreshment he tasted the meaning of recent agitations. He had seen that Charlotte could contribute—what he hadn't seen was what she could contribute *to*. When it had all supremely cleared up and he had simply settled this service to his daughter well before him as the proper direction of his young friend's leisure, the cool darkness had again closed round him, but his moral lucidity was constituted. It wasn't only moreover that the word, with a click, so fitted the riddle, but that the riddle, in such perfection, fitted the word. He might have been equally in want and yet not have had his remedy. Oh if Charlotte didn't accept him the remedy of course would fail; but, as everything had fallen together, it was at least there to be tried. And success would be great—that was his last throb—if the measure of relief effected for Maggie should at all prove to have been given by his own actual sense

of felicity. He really didn't know when in his life he had thought of anything happier. To think of it merely for himself would have been, even as he had just lately felt, even doing all justice to that condition —yes, impossible. But there was a grand difference in thinking of it for his child.

VI

It was at Brighton above all that this difference came out ; it was during the three wonderful days he spent there with Charlotte that he had acquainted himself further—though doubtless not even now quite completely—with the merits of his majestic scheme. And while moreover, to begin with, he still but held his vision in place, steadying it fairly, with his hands, as he had often steadied for inspection a precarious old pot or kept a glazed picture in its right relation to the light, the other, the outer presumptions in his favour, those independent of what he might himself contribute and that therefore, till he should "speak," remained necessarily vague—*that* quantity, I say, struck him as positively multiplying, as putting on, in the fresh Brighton air and on the sunny Brighton front, a kind of tempting palpability. He liked, at this preliminary stage, to feel he should be able to "speak" and that he would ; the word itself being romantic, pressing for him the spring of association with stories and plays where handsome and ardent young men, in uniforms, tights, cloaks, high-boots, had it, in soliloquies, ever on their lips ; and the sense on the first day that he should probably have taken the great step before the second was over conduced already to make him say to his companion that they must spend more than their mere night or two. At his ease on the ground of what was before him he at all events definitely desired to be,

and it was strongly his impression that he was proceeding step by step. He was acting -it kept coming back to that—not in the dark, but in the high golden morning ; not in precipitation, flurry, fever, dangers these of the path of passion properly so called, but with the deliberation of a plan, a plan that might be a thing of less joy than a passion, but that probably would, in compensation for that loss, be found to have the essential property, to wear even the decent dignity, of reaching further and of providing for more contingencies. The season was, in local parlance, "on," the elements were assembled ; the big windy hotel, the draughty social hall, swarmed with "types," in Charlotte's constant phrase, and resounded with a din in which the wild music of gilded and befrogged bands, Croatian, Dalmatian, Carpathian, violently exotic and nostalgic, was distinguished as struggling against the perpetual popping of corks. Much of this would decidedly have disconcerted our friends if it hadn't all happened, more preponderantly, to give them the brighter surprise. The noble privacy of Fawns had left them—had left Mr. Verver at least —with a little accumulated sum of tolerance to spend on the high pitch and high colour of the public sphere. Fawns, as it had been for him, and as Maggie and Fanny Assingham had both attested, was out of the world, whereas the scene actually about him, with the very sea a mere big booming medium for excursions and aquariums, affected him as so plump in the conscious centre that nothing could have been more complete for representing that pulse of life which they had come to unanimity at home on the subject of their advisedly not hereafter forgetting. The pulse of life was what Charlotte, in her way, at home, had lately reproduced, and there were positively current hours when it might have been open to her companion to feel himself again indebted to her for

introductions. He had "brought" her, to put it crudely, but it was almost as if she were herself, in her greater gaiety, her livelier curiosity and intensity, her readier, happier irony, taking him about and showing him the place. No one, really, when he came to think, had ever taken him about before—it had always been he, of old, who took others and who in particular took Maggie. This quickly fell into its relation with him as part of an experience—marking for him no doubt what people call considerately a time of life; a new and pleasant order, a flattered passive state that might become—why shouldn't it?—one of the comforts of the future.

Mr. Gutermann-Seuss proved, on the second day—our friend had waited till then—a remarkably genial, a positively lustrous young man occupying a small neat house in a quarter of the place remote from the front and living, as immediate and striking signs testified, in the bosom of his family. Our visitors found themselves introduced, by the operation of close contiguity, to a numerous group of ladies and gentlemen older and younger, and of children larger and smaller, who mostly affected them as scarce less anointed for hospitality and who produced at first the impression of a birthday party, or some anniversary gregariously and religiously kept, though they subsequently fell into their places as members of one quiet domestic circle, preponderantly and directly indebted for their being in fact to Mr. Gutermann-Seuss. To the casual eye a mere smart and shining youth of less than thirty summers, faultlessly appointed in every particular, he yet stood among his progeny—eleven in all, as he confessed without a sigh, eleven little brown clear faces, yet with such impersonal old eyes astride of such impersonal old noses—while he entertained the great American collector whom he had so long hoped he

might meet, and whose charming companion, the handsome frank familiar young lady, presumably Mrs. Verver, noticed the graduated offspring, noticed the fat ear-ringed aunts and the glossy cockneyfied familiar uncles, inimitable of accent and assumption, and of an attitude of cruder intention than that of the head of the firm ; noticed the place in short, noticed the treasure produced, noticed everything, as from the habit of a person finding her account at any time, according to a wisdom well learned of life, in almost any "funny" impression. It really came home to her friend on the spot that this free range of observation in her, picking out the frequent funny with extraordinary promptness, would verily henceforth make a different thing for him of such experiences, of the customary hunt for the possible prize, the inquisitive play of his accepted monomania ; which different thing would probably be a lighter and perhaps thereby a somewhat more boisterously refreshing form of sport. Such omens struck one as vivid, in any case, when Mr. Gutermann-Seuss, with a sharpness of discrimination he had at first scarce seemed to promise, invited his eminent couple into another room, before the threshold of which the rest of the tribe, unanimously faltering, dropped out of the scene. The treasure itself here, the objects on behalf of which Mr. Verver's interest had been booked, established quickly enough their claim to engage the latter's attention ; yet at what point of his past did our friend's memory, looking back and back, catch him, in any such place, thinking so much less of wares artfully paraded than of some other and quite irrelevant presence ? Such places weren't strange to him when they took the form of bourgeois back parlours, a trifle ominously grey and grim from their north light, at watering-places prevailingly homes of humbug, or even when they wore some

aspect still less, if not perhaps still more, insidious. He had been everywhere, pried and prowled everywhere, going, on occasion, so far as to risk, he believed, life, health and the very bloom of honour; but where, while precious things, extracted one by one from thrice-locked yet often vulgar drawers and soft satchels of old oriental silk, were impressively ranged before him, had he till now let himself, in consciousness, wander like one of the vague?

He didn't betray it—ah *that* he knew; but two recognitions took place for him at once, and one of them suffered a little in sweetness by the confusion. Mr. Gutermann-Seuss had truly, for the crisis, the putting down of his cards, a rare manner; he was perfect master of what not to say to such a personage as Mr. Verver while the particular importance that dispenses with chatter was diffused by his movements themselves, his repeated act of passage between a featureless mahogany *meuble* and a table so virtuously disinterested as to look fairly smug under a cotton cloth of faded maroon and indigo, all redolent of patriarchal teas. The Damascene tiles, successively and oh so tenderly unmuffled and revealed, lay there at last in their full harmony and their venerable splendour, but the tribute of appreciation and decision was, while the spectator considered, simplified to a point that but just failed of representing levity on the part of a man who had always acknowledged without shame in such affairs the intrinsic charm of what was called discussion. The infinitely ancient, the immemorial amethystine blue of the glaze, scarcely more meant to be breathed upon, it would seem, than the cheek of royalty—this property of the ordered and matched array had inevitably all its determination for him; but his submission was, perhaps for the first time in his life, of the quick mind alone, the process really itself, in its way, as fine as

the perfection perceived and admired : every inch of the rest of him being given to the foreknowledge that an hour or two later he should have "spoken." The burning of his ships therefore waited too near to let him handle his opportunity with his usual firm and sentient fingers—waited somehow in the predominance of Charlotte's very person, in her being there exactly as she was, capable, as Mr. Gutermann-Seuss himself was capable, of the right felicity of silence, but with an embracing ease, through it all, that made deferred criticism as fragrant as some joy promised a lover by his mistress, or as a big bridal bouquet held patiently behind her. He couldn't otherwise have explained, surely, why he found himself thinking, to his enjoyment, of so many other matters than the felicity of his acquisition and the figure of his cheque, quite equally high ; any more than why, later on, with their return to the room in which they had been received and the renewed encompassment of the tribe, he felt quite merged in the elated circle formed by the girl's free response to the collective caress of all the shining eyes, and by her genial acceptance of the heavy cake and port wine that, as she was afterwards to note, added to their transaction, for a finish, the touch of some mystic rite of old Jewry.

This characterisation came from her as they walked away—walked together, in the waning afternoon, back to the breezy sea and the bustling front, back to the rumble and the flutter and the shining shops that sharpened the grin of solicitation on the mask of night. They were walking thus, as he felt, nearer and nearer to where he should see his ships burn, and it was meanwhile for him quite as if this red glow would impart, at the harmonious hour, a lurid grandeur to his good faith. It was meanwhile too a sign of the kind of sensibility often playing up

in him that—fabulous as this truth may sound—he found a sentimental link, an obligation of delicacy, or perhaps even one of the penalties of its opposite, in his having exposed her to the north light, the quite properly hard business-light, of the room in which they had been alone with the treasure and its master. She had listened to the name of the sum he was capable of looking in the face. Given the relation of intimacy with him she had already beyond all retractation accepted, the stir of the air produced at the other place by that high figure struck him as a thing that, from the moment she had exclaimed or protested as little as he himself had apologised, left him but one thing more to do. A man of decent feeling didn't thrust his money, a huge lump of it, in such a way, under a poor girl's nose—a girl whose poverty was, after a fashion, the very basis of her enjoyment of his hospitality—without seeing, logically, a responsibility attached. And this was to remain none the less true for the fact that twenty minutes later, after he had applied his torch, applied it with a sign or two of insistence, what might definitely result failed to be immediately clear. He had spoken —spoken as they sat together on the out-of-the-way bench observed during one of their walks and kept for the previous quarter of the present hour well in his memory's eye ; the particular spot to which, between intense pauses and intenser advances, he had all the while consistently led her. Below the great consolidated cliff, well on to where the city of stucco sat most architecturally perched, with the rumbling beach and the rising tide and the freshening stars in front and above, the safe sense of the whole place yet prevailed in lamps and seats and flagged walks, hovering also overhead in the close neighbourhood of a great replete community about to assist anew at the removal of dish-covers.

"We've had, as it seems to me, such quite beautiful days together that I hope it won't come to you too much as a shock when I ask if you think you could regard me with any satisfaction as a husband." As if he had known she wouldn't, she of course couldn't, at all gracefully and whether or no, reply with a rush, he had said a little more—quite as he had felt he must in thinking it out in advance. He had put the question on which there was no going back and which represented thereby the sacrifice of his vessels, and what he further said was to stand for the redoubled thrust of flame that would make combustion sure. "This isn't sudden to me, and I've wondered at moments if you haven't felt me coming to it. I've been coming ever since we left Fawns—I really started while we were there." He spoke slowly, giving her, as he desired, time to think; all the more that it was making her look at him steadily, and making her also, in a remarkable degree, look "well" while she did so—a large and so far a happy consequence. She wasn't at all events shocked—which he had glanced at but for a handsome humility—and he would give her as many minutes as she liked. "You mustn't think I'm forgetting that I'm not young."

"Oh that isn't so. It's I who am old. You *are* young." This was what she had at first answered—and quite in the tone too of having taken her minutes. It hadn't been wholly to the point, but it had been kind—which was what he most wanted. And she kept, for her next words, to kindness, kept to her clear lowered voice and unshrinking face. "To me too it thoroughly seems that these days have been beautiful. I shouldn't be grateful to them if I couldn't more or less have imagined their bringing us to this." She affected him somehow as if she had advanced a step to meet him and yet were at the

same time standing still. It only meant, however, doubtless, that she was gravely and reasonably thinking—as he exactly desired to make her. If she would but think enough she would probably think to suit him. "It seems to me," she went on, "that it's for *you* to be sure."

"Ah but I *am* sure," said Adam Verver. "On matters of importance I never speak when I'm not. So if you can yourself face such a union you needn't in the least trouble."

She had another pause, and she might have been felt as facing it while, through lamplight and dusk, through the breath of the mild slightly damp south-west, she met his eyes without evasion. Yet she had at the end of another minute debated only to the extent of saying: "I won't pretend I don't think it would be good for me to marry. Good for me, I mean," she pursued, "because I'm so awfully unattached. I should like to be a little less adrift. I should like to have a home. I should like to have an existence. I should like to have a motive for one thing more than another—a motive outside of myself. In fact," she said, so sincerely that it almost showed pain, yet so lucidly that it almost showed humour, "in fact, you know, I want to *be* married. It's—well, it's the condition."

"The condition——?" He was just vague.

"It's the state, I mean. I don't like my own. 'Miss,' among us all, is too dreadful—except for a shopgirl. I don't want to be a horrible English old-maid."

"Oh you want to be taken care of. Very well then I'll do it."

"I daresay it's very much that. Only I don't see why, for what I speak of," she smiled—"for a mere escape from my state—I need do quite so *much*."

"So much as marry me in particular?"

Her smile was as for true directness. "I might get what I want for less."

"You think it's so much for you to do?"

"Yes," she presently said, "I think it's a great deal."

Then it was that, though she was so gentle, so quite perfect with him, and he felt he had come on far—then it was that of a sudden something seemed to fail and he didn't quite know where they were. There rose for him with this the fact, to be sure, of their disparity, ignore it as mercifully and perversely as she would. He might have been her father. "Of course, yes—that's my disadvantage: I'm not the natural, I'm so far from being the ideal, match to your youth and your beauty. I've the drawback that you've seen me always, and so inevitably, in such another light."

But she gave a slow headshake that made contradiction soft—made it almost sad, in fact, as from having to be so complete; and he had already, before she spoke, the dim vision of some objection in her mind beside which the one he had named was light, and which therefore must be strangely deep. "You don't understand me. It's of all that it is for *you* to do—it's of that I'm thinking."

Oh with this for him the thing was clearer! "Then you needn't think. I know enough what it is for me to do."

But she shook her head again. "I doubt if you know. I doubt if you *can*."

"And why not, please—when I've had you so before me? That I'm old has at least *that* fact about it to the good—that I've known you long and from far back."

"Do you think you've 'known' me?" asked Charlotte Stant.

He debated—for the tone of it, and her look with it might have made him doubt. Just these things in themselves, however, with all the rest, with his fixed purpose now, his committed deed, the fine pink glow, projected forward, of his ships, behind him, definitely blazing and crackling—this quantity was to push him harder than any word of her own could warn him. All that she was herself, moreover, was so lighted, to its advantage, by the pink glow. He wasn't rabid, but he wasn't either, as a man of a proper spirit, to be frightened. "What is that then—if I accept it—but as strong a reason as I can want for just *learning* to know you?"

She faced him always—kept it up as for honesty, and yet at the same time, in her odd way, as for mercy. "How can you tell whether if you did you would?" It was ambiguous for an instant, as she showed she felt. "I mean when it's a question of learning one learns sometimes too late."

"I think it's a question," he promptly enough made answer, "of liking you the more just for your saying these things. You should make something," he added, "of my liking you."

"I make everything. But are you sure of having exhausted all other ways?"

This of a truth enlarged his gaze. "But what other ways——?"

"Why you've more ways of being kind than any one I ever knew."

"Take it then," he answered, "that I'm simply putting them all together for you." She looked at him, on this, long again—still as if it shouldn't be said she hadn't given him time or had withdrawn from his view, so to speak, a single inch of her surface. This at least she was fully to have exposed. It represented her as oddly conscientious, and he scarce knew in what sense it affected him. On the whole,

however, with admiration. "You're very, very honourable."

"It's just what I want to be. I don't see," she added, "why you're not right, I don't see why you're not happy, as you are. I can't not ask myself, I can't not ask *you*," she went on, "if you're really as much at liberty as your universal generosity leads you to assume. Oughtn't we," she said, "to think a little of others? Oughtn't I at least in loyalty—at any rate in delicacy—to think of Maggie?" With which, intensely gentle, so as not to appear too much to teach him his duty, she explained. "She's everything to you—she has always been. Are you so certain that there's room in your life——?"

"For another daughter?—is that what you mean?" She hadn't hung upon it long, but he had quickly taken her up.

He hadn't, however, disconcerted her. "For another young woman—very much of her age, and whose relation to her has always been so different from what our marrying would make it. For another companion," said Charlotte Stant.

"Can't a man be, all his life then," he almost fiercely asked, "anything but a father?" But he went on before she could answer. "You talk about differences, but they've been already made—as no one knows better than Maggie. She feels the one she made herself by her own marriage—made I mean for me. She constantly thinks of it—it allows her no rest. To put her at peace is therefore," he explained, "what I'm trying, with you, to do. I can't do it alone, but I can do it with your help. You can make her," he said, "positively happy about me."

"About you?" she thoughtfully echoed. "But what can I make her about herself?"

"Oh if she's at ease about me the rest will take care of itself. The case," he declared, "is in your

hands. You'll effectually put out of her mind that I feel she has abandoned me."

Interest certainly now was what he had kindled in her face, but it was all the more honourable to her, as he had just called it, that she should want to see each of the steps of his conviction. "If you've been driven to the 'likes' of me mayn't it show that you've truly felt forsaken?"

"Well, I'm willing to suggest that, if I can show at the same time that I feel consoled."

"But *have* you," she demanded, "really felt so?"

He thought. "Consoled?"

"Forsaken."

"No—I haven't. But if it's her idea——!" If it was her idea, in short, that was enough. This enunciation of motive the next moment however sounded to him perhaps slightly thin, so that he gave it another touch. "That is if it's my idea. I happen, you see, to like my idea."

"Well, it's beautiful and wonderful. But isn't it, possibly," Charlotte asked, "not quite enough to marry me for?"

"Why so, my dear child? Isn't a man's idea usually what he does marry for?"

Charlotte, considering, looked as if this might perhaps be a large question, or at all events something of an extension of the one they were immediately concerned with. "Doesn't that a good deal depend on the sort of thing it may be?" She suggested that about marriage ideas, as he called them, might differ; with which however, giving no more time to it, she sounded another question. "Don't you appear rather to put it to me that I may accept your offer for Maggie's sake? Somehow"—she turned it over—"I don't so clearly *see* her quite so much finding reassurance, or even quite so much needing it."

"Do you then make nothing at all of her having been so ready to leave us?"

Ah Charlotte on the contrary made much! "She was ready to leave us because she had to be. From the moment the Prince wanted it she could only go with him."

"Perfectly—so that if you see your way she'll be able to 'go with him' in future as much as she likes."

Charlotte appeared to examine for a minute, in Maggie's interest, this privilege—the result of which was a limited concession. "You've certainly worked it out!"

"Of course I've worked it out—that's exactly what I *have* done. She hadn't for a long time been so happy about anything as at your being there with me."

"I was to be with you," said Charlotte, "for her security."

"Well," Adam Verver rang out, "this *is* her security. You've only, if you can't see it, to ask her."

"'Ask' her?"—the girl echoed it in wonder.

"Certainly—in so many words. Telling her you don't believe me."

Still she debated. "Do you mean write it to her?"

"Quite so. Immediately. To-morrow."

"Oh I don't think I can write it," said Charlotte Stant. "When I write to her"—and she looked amused for so different a shade—"it's about the Principino's appetite and Dr. Brady's visits."

"Very good then—put it to her face to face. We'll go straight to Paris to meet them."

Charlotte, at this, rose with a movement that was like a small cry; but her unspoken sense lost itself while she stood with her eyes on him—he keeping his seat as for the help it gave him, a little, to make his appeal go up. Presently, however, a new sense had

come to her, and she covered him kindly with the expression of it. "I do think, you know, you must rather 'like' me."

"Thank you," said Adam Verver. "You *will* put it to her yourself then?"

She had another hesitation. "We go over you say to meet them?"

"As soon as we can get back to Fawns. And wait there for them, if necessary, till they come."

"Wait—a—at Fawns?"

"Wait in Paris. That will be charming in itself."

"You take me to pleasant places." She turned it over. "You propose to me beautiful things."

"It rests but with you to make them beautiful and pleasant. You've made Brighton——!"

"Ah!"—she almost tenderly protested. "With what I'm doing now?"

"You're promising me now what I want. Aren't you promising me," he pressed, getting up, "aren't you promising me to abide by what Maggie says?"

Oh she wanted to be sure she was. "Do you mean she'll *ask* it of me?"

It gave him indeed, as by communication, a sense of the propriety of being himself certain. Yet what *was* he but certain? "She'll speak to you. She'll speak to you *for* me."

This at last then seemed to satisfy her. "Very good. May we wait again to talk of it till she has done so?"

He showed, with his hands down in his pockets and his shoulders expressively up, a certain disappointment. Soon enough, none the less, his gentleness was all back and his patience once more exemplary. "Of course I give you time. Especially," he smiled, "as it's time that I shall be spending with you. Our keeping on together will help you perhaps to see. To see I mean how I need you."

"I already see," said Charlotte, "how you've persuaded yourself you do." But she had to repeat it. "That isn't unfortunately all."

"Well then how you'll make Maggie right."

"'Right'?" She echoed it as if the word went far. And "O-oh!" she still critically murmured as they moved together away.

VII

He had talked to her of their waiting in Paris a week later, but on the spot there this period of patience suffered no great strain. He had written to his daughter, not indeed from Brighton, but directly after their return to Fawns, where they spent only forty-eight hours before resuming their journey; and Maggie's reply to his news was a telegram from Rome, delivered to him at noon of their fourth day and which he brought out to Charlotte, who was seated at that moment in the court of the hotel, where they had agreed he should join her for their proceeding together to the noontide meal. His letter, at Fawns—a letter of several pages and intended lucidly, unreservedly, in fact all but triumphantly, to inform—had proved on his sitting down to it and a little to his surprise not quite so simple a document to frame as even his due consciousness of its weight of meaning had allowed him to assume: this doubtless however only for reasons naturally latent in the very wealth of that consciousness, which contributed to his message something of their own quality of impatience. The main result of their talk for the time had been a difference in his relation to his young friend, as well as a difference, equally sensible, in her relation to himself; and this in spite of his not having again renewed his undertaking to "speak" to her so far even as to tell her of the communication despatched to Rome. Delicacy,

a delicacy more beautiful still, all the delicacy she should want, reigned between them—it being rudimentary, in their actual order, that she mustn't be further worried until Maggie should have put her at her ease.

It was just the delicacy, nevertheless, that in Paris —which, suggestively, was Brighton at a hundredfold higher pitch—made between him and his associate the tension, made the suspense, made what he would have consented perhaps to call the provisional peculiarity, of present conditions. These elements acted in a manner of their own, imposing and involving, under one head, many abstentions and precautions, twenty anxieties and reminders—things verily he would scarce have known how to express ; and yet creating for them at every step an acceptance of their reality. He was hanging back with Charlotte till another person should intervene for their assistance, and yet they had, by what had already occurred, been carried on to something it was out of the power of other persons to make either less or greater. Common conventions—that was what was odd—had to be on this basis more thought of ; those common conventions that, previous to the passage by the Brighton strand, he had so enjoyed the sense of their overlooking. The explanation would have been, he supposed—or would have figured it with less of unrest —that Paris had, in its way, deeper voices and warnings, so that if you went at all " far " there it laid bristling traps, as they might have been viewed, all smothered in flowers, for your going further still. There were strange appearances in the air, and before you knew it you might be unmistakably matching them. Since he wished therefore to match no appearance but that of a gentleman playing with perfect fairness any game in life he might be called to, he found himself on the receipt of Maggie's missive

rejoicing with a certain inconsistency. The announcement made her from home had, in the act, cost some biting of his pen to sundry parts of him—his personal modesty, his imagination of her prepared state for so quick a jump, it didn't much matter which—and yet he was more eager than not for the drop of delay and for the quicker transitions promised by the arrival of the imminent pair. There was after all a hint of offence to a man of his age in being taken, as they said at the shops, on approval. Maggie certainly would have been as far as Charlotte herself from positively desiring this, and Charlotte on her side as far as Maggie from holding him light as a real value. She made him fidget thus, poor girl, but from generous rigour of conscience.

These allowances of his spirit were all the same consistent with a great gladness at the sight of the term of his ordeal; for it was the end of his seeming to agree that questions and doubts had a place. The more he had inwardly turned the matter over the more it had struck him that they had in truth only an ugliness. What he could have best borne, as he now believed, would have been Charlotte's simply saying to him that she didn't like him enough. This he wouldn't have enjoyed, but he would quite have understood it and been able ruefully to submit. She *did* like him enough—nothing to contradict that had come out for him; so that he was restless for her as well as for himself. She looked at him hard a moment when he handed her his telegram, and the look, for what he fancied a dim shy fear in it, gave him perhaps his best moment of conviction that—as a man, so to speak—he properly pleased her. He said nothing—the words sufficiently did it for him, doing it again better still as Charlotte, who had left her chair at his approach, murmured them out. "We start to-night to bring you all our love and joy and

sympathy." There they were, the words, and what did she want more ? She didn't however as she gave him back the little unfolded leaf say they were enough —though he saw the next moment that her silence was probably not disconnected from her having just visibly turned pale. Her extraordinarily fine eyes, as it was his present theory that he had always thought them, shone at him the more darkly out of this change of colour ; and she had again with it her apparent way of subjecting herself, for explicit honesty and through her willingness to face him, to any view he might take, all at his ease, and even to wantonness, of the condition he produced in her. As soon as he saw how emotion kept her soundless he knew himself deeply touched, since it proved that, little as she professed, she had been beautifully hoping. They stood there a minute while he took in from this sign that, yes then, certainly she liked him enough—liked him enough to make him, old as he was ready to brand himself, flush for the pleasure of it. The pleasure of it accordingly made him speak first. " Do you begin a little to be satisfied ? "

Still, oh still a little, she had to think. " We've hurried them you see. Why so breathless a start ? "

" Because they want to congratulate us. They want," said Adam Verver, " to *see* our happiness."

She wondered again—and this time also, for him, as publicly as possible. " So much as that ? "

" Do you think it's too much ? "

She continued to think plainly. " They weren't to have started for another week."

" Well, what then ? Isn't our situation worth the little sacrifice ? We'll go back to Rome as soon as you like *with* them."

This seemed to hold her—as he had previously seen her held, just a trifle inscrutably, by his allusions to what they would do together on a certain contin-

gency. "Worth it, the little sacrifice, for whom? For us, naturally—yes," she said. "We want to see them—for our reasons. That is," she rather dimly smiled, "*you* do."

"And you do, my dear, too!" he bravely declared.

"Yes then—I do too," she after an instant ungrudgingly enough acknowledged. "For us, however, something depends on it."

"Rather! But does nothing depend on it for them?"

"What *can*—from the moment that, as appears, they don't want to nip us in the bud? I can imagine their rushing up to prevent us. But an enthusiasm for us that can wait so very little—such intense eagerness, I confess," she went on, "more than a little puzzles me. You may think me," she also added, "ungracious and suspicious, but the Prince can't at all *want* to come back so soon. He wanted quite too intensely to get away."

Mr. Verver considered. "Well, hasn't he been away?"

"Yes, just long enough to see how he likes it. Besides," said Charlotte, "he mayn't be able to join in the rosy view of our case that you impute to Maggie. It can't in the least have appeared to him hitherto a matter of course that you should give his wife a bouncing stepmother."

Adam Verver at this looked grave. "I'm afraid then he'll just have to accept from us whatever his wife accepts; and accept it—if he can imagine no better reason—just because she does. That," he declared, "will have to do for him."

His tone made her for a moment meet his face; after which, "Let me," she abruptly said, "see it again"—taking from him the folded leaf that she had given back and he had kept in his hand. "Isn't

the whole thing," she asked when she had read it over, "perhaps but a way like another for their gaining time?"

He again stood staring; but the next minute, with that upward spring of his shoulders and that downward pressure of his pockets which she had already more than once at disconcerted moments determined in him, he turned sharply away and wandered from her in silence. He looked about in his small despair; he crossed the hotel court, which, overarched and glazed, muffled against loud sounds and guarded against crude sights, heated, gilded, draped, almost carpeted, with exotic trees in tubs, exotic ladies in chairs, the general exotic accent and presence suspended, as with wings folded or feebly fluttering, in the superior, the supreme, the inexorably enveloping Parisian medium, resembled some critical apartment of large capacity, some "dental," medical, surgical waiting-room, a scene of mixed anxiety and desire, preparatory, for gathered barbarians, to the due amputation or extraction of excrescences and redundancies of barbarism. He went as far as the porte-cochère, took counsel afresh of his usual optimism, sharpened even somehow just here by the very air he tasted, and then came back smiling to Charlotte. "It's incredible to you that when a man is still as much in love as Amerigo his most natural impulse should be to feel what his wife feels, to believe what she believes, to want what she wants?—in the absence, that is, of special impediments to his so doing."

The manner of it operated—she acknowledged with no great delay this natural possibility. "No—nothing is incredible to me of people immensely in love."

"Well, isn't Amerigo immensely in love?"

She hesitated but as for the right expression of her

sense of the degree—but she after all adopted Mr. Verver's. "Immensely."

"Then there you are!"

She had another smile, however—she wasn't there quite yet. "That isn't all that's wanted."

"But what more?"

"Why that his wife shall have made him really believe that *she* really believes." With which Charlotte became still more lucidly logical. "The reality of his belief will depend in such a case on the reality of hers. The Prince may for instance now," she went on, "have made out to his satisfaction that Maggie may mainly desire to abound in your sense, whatever it is you do. He may remember that he has never seen her do anything else."

"Well," said Adam Verver, "what kind of a warning will he have found in that? To what catastrophe will he have observed such a disposition in her to lead?"

"Just to *this* one!" With which she struck him as rising straighter and clearer before him than she had done even yet.

"Our little question itself?" Her appearance had in fact at the moment such an effect on him that he could answer but in marvelling mildness. "Hadn't we better wait a while till we call it a catastrophe?"

Her rejoinder to this *was* to wait—though by no means so long as he meant. When at the end of her minute she spoke, however, it was mildly too. "What would you like, dear friend, to wait for?" It lingered between them in the air, this demand, and they exchanged for the time a look which might have made each of them seem to have been watching in the other the signs of its overt irony. These were indeed immediately so visible in Mr. Verver's face that, as if a little ashamed of having so markedly produced them—and as if also to bring out at last, under

pressure, something she had all the while been keeping back—she took a jump to pure plain reason. "You haven't noticed for yourself, but I can't quite help noticing, that in spite of what you assume—*we* assume, if you like—Maggie wires her joy only to you. She makes no sign of its overflow to me."

It was a point—and, staring a moment, he took account of it. But he had, as before, his presence of mind—to say nothing of his kindly humour. "Why you complain of the very thing that's most charmingly conclusive! She treats us already as *one*."

Clearly now for the girl, in spite of lucidity and logic, there was something in the way he said things——! She faced him in all her desire to please him, and then her word quite simply and definitely showed it. "I do like you, you know."

Well, what could this do but stimulate his humour? "I see what's the matter with you. You won't be quiet till you've heard from the Prince himself. I think," the happy man added, "that I'll go and secretly wire to him that you'd like, reply paid, a few words for yourself."

It could apparently but encourage her further to smile. "Reply paid for him, you mean—or for me?"

"Oh I'll pay with pleasure anything back for you—as many words as you like." And he went on, to keep it up. "Not requiring either to see your message."

She could take it, visibly, as he meant it. "Should you require to see the Prince's?"

"Not a bit. You can keep that also to yourself."

On his speaking however as if his transmitting the hint were a real question, she appeared to consider—and almost as for good taste—that the joke had gone far enough. "It doesn't matter. Unless he

speaks of his own movement——! And why should it be," she asked, "a thing that *would* occur to him?"

"I really think," Mr Verver concurred, "that it naturally wouldn't. *He* doesn't know you're morbid."

She just wondered—but she agreed. "No—he hasn't yet found it out. Perhaps he will, but he hasn't yet; and I'm willing to give him meanwhile the benefit of the doubt." So with this the situation, to her view, would appear to have cleared hadn't she too quickly had one of her restless relapses. "Maggie, however, does know I'm morbid. *She* hasn't the benefit."

"Well," said Adam Verver a little wearily at last, "I think I feel that you'll hear from her yet." It had even fairly come over him, under recurrent suggestion, that his daughter's omission *was* surprising. And Maggie had never in her life been wrong for more than three minutes.

"Oh it isn't that I hold that I've a *right* to it," Charlotte the next instant rather oddly qualified—and the observation itself gave him a further push.

"Very well—I shall like it myself."

At this then, as if moved by his habit of mostly—and more or less against his own contention—coming round to her, she showed how she could also ever, and not less gently, come halfway. "I speak of it only as the missing *grace*—the grace that's in everything Maggie does. It isn't my due"—she kept it up—"but, taking from you that we may still expect it, it will have the touch. It will be beautiful."

"Then come out to breakfast." Mr Verver had looked at his watch. "It will be here when we get back."

"If it isn't"—and Charlotte smiled as she looked

about for a feather boa that she had laid down on descending from her room—" if it isn't it will have had but *that* slight fault."

He saw her boa on the arm of the chair from which she had moved to meet him, and, after he had fetched it, raising it to make its charming softness brush his face—for it was a wondrous product of Paris, purchased under his direct auspices the day before—he held it there a minute before giving it up. " Will you promise me then to be at peace ? "

She looked, while she debated, at his admirable present. " I promise you."

" Quite for ever ? "

" Quite for ever."

" Remember," he went on, to justify his demand, " remember that in wiring you she'll naturally speak even more for her husband than she has done in wiring me."

It was only at a word that Charlotte had a demur. " ' Naturally '—— ? "

" Why our marriage puts him for you, you see—or puts you for him—into a new relation, whereas it leaves his relation to me unchanged. It therefore gives him more to say to you about it."

" About its making me his stepmother-in-law—or whatever I *should* become ? " Over which for a little she not undivertedly mused. " Yes, there may easily be enough for a gentleman to say to a young woman about that."

" Well, Amerigo can always be, according to the case, either as funny or as serious as you like ; and whichever he may be for you, in sending you a message, he'll be it *all*." And then as the girl, with one of her so deeply and oddly, yet so tenderly critical looks at him, failed to take up the remark, he found himself moved, as by a vague anxiety, to add a question. " Don't you think he's charming ? "

"Oh charming," said Charlotte Stant. "If he weren't I shouldn't mind."

"No more should I!" her friend harmoniously returned.

"Ah but you *don't* mind. You don't have to. You don't have to, I mean, as I have. It's the last folly ever to care, in an anxious way, the least particle more than one's absolutely forced. If I were you," she went on—"if I had in my life, for happiness and power and peace, even a small fraction of what you have, it would take a great deal to make me waste my worry. I don't know," she said, "what in the world—that didn't touch my luck—I should trouble my head about."

"I quite understand you—yet doesn't it just depend," Mr. Verver asked, "on what you call one's luck? It's exactly my luck that I'm talking about. I shall be as sublime as you like when you've made me all right. It's only when one *is* right that one really has the things you speak of. It isn't they," he explained, "that make one so: it's the something else I want that makes *them* right. If you'll give me what I ask you'll see."

She had taken her boa and thrown it over her shoulders, and her eyes, while she still delayed, had turned from him, engaged by another interest, though the court was by this time, the hour of dispersal for luncheon, so forsaken that they would have had it, for free talk, should they have been moved to loudness, quite to themselves. She was ready for their adjournment, but she was also aware of a pedestrian youth in uniform, a visible emissary of the Postes et Télégraphes, who had approached, from the street, the small stronghold of the concierge and who presented there a missive taken from the little cartridge-box slung over his shoulder. The portress, meeting him on the threshold, met equally,

across the court, Charlotte's marked attention to his visit, so that within the minute she had advanced to our friends with her cap-streamers flying and her smile of announcement as ample as her broad white apron. She raised aloft a telegraphic message and as she delivered it sociably discriminated. "Cette fois-ci pour madame!"—with which she as genially retreated, leaving Charlotte in possession. Charlotte, taking it, held it at first unopened. Her eyes had come back to her companion, who had immediately and triumphantly greeted it. "Ah there you are!"

She broke the envelope then in silence, and for a minute, as with the message he himself had put before her, studied its contents without a sign. He watched her without a question and at last she looked up. "I'll give you," she simply said, "what you ask."

The expression of her face was strange — but since when had a woman's at moments of supreme surrender not a right to be? He took it in with his own long look and his grateful silence—so that nothing more for some instants passed between them. Their understanding sealed itself—he already felt she had made him right. But he was in presence too of the fact that Maggie had made *her* so; and always therefore without Maggie where in fine would he be? She united them, brought them together as with the click of a silver spring, so that on the spot, with the vision of it, his eyes filled, Charlotte facing him meanwhile with her expression made still stranger by the blur of his gratitude. Quite through it withal he smiled. "What my child does for me——!"

Through it all as well, that is still through the blur, he saw Charlotte, rather than heard her, reply. She held her paper wide open, but her eyes were wholly for his. "It isn't Maggie. It's the Prince."

"I *say*!"—he gaily rang out. "Then it's best of all."

"It's enough."

"Thank you for thinking so!" To which he added: "It's enough for our question, but it isn't—is it?—quite enough for our breakfast? Déjeunons."

She stood there however in spite of this appeal, her document always before them. "Don't you want to read it?"

He thought. "Not if it satisfies you. I don't require it."

But she gave him, as for her conscience, another chance. "You can if you like."

He hesitated afresh, but as for amiability, not for curiosity. "Is it funny?"

Thus, finally, she again dropped her eyes on it, drawing in her lips a little. "No—I call it grave."

"Ah then I don't want it."

"Very grave," said Charlotte Stant.

"Well, what did I tell you of him?" he asked, rejoicing, as they started: a question for all answer to which, before she took his arm, the girl thrust her paper crumpled into the pocket of her coat.

BOOK THIRD

I

CHARLOTTE, halfway up the "monumental" staircase, had begun by waiting alone—waiting to be rejoined by her companion, who had gone down all the way, as in common kindness bound, and who, his duty performed, would know where to find her. She was meanwhile, though extremely apparent, not perhaps absolutely advertised; but she wouldn't have cared if she had been—so little was it by this time her first occasion of facing society with a consciousness materially, with a confidence quite splendidly, enriched. For a couple of years now she had known as never before what it was to look "well"—to look, that is, as well as she had always felt, from far back, that in certain conditions she might. On such an evening as this, that of a great official party in the full flush of the London spring-time, the conditions affected her, her nerves, her senses, her imagination, as all profusely present; so that perhaps at no moment yet had she been so justified of her faith as at the particular instant of our being again concerned with her, that of her chancing to glance higher up from where she stood and meeting in consequence the quiet eyes of Colonel Assingham, who had his elbows on the broad balustrade of the great gallery overhanging the staircase and who immediately exchanged with her one of his most artlessly familiar signals. This simplicity of his

visual attention struck her, even with the other things she had to think about, as the quietest note in the whole high pitch—much in fact as if she had pressed a finger on a chord or a key and created, for the number of seconds, an arrest of vibration, a more muffled thump. The sight of him suggested indeed that Fanny would be there, though so far as opportunity went she hadn't seen her. This was about the limit of what it could suggest.

The air, however, had suggestions enough—it abounded in them, many of them precisely helping to constitute those conditions with which, for our young woman, the hour was brilliantly crowned. She was herself in truth crowned, and it all hung together, melted together, in light and colour and sound: the unsurpassed diamonds that her head so happily carried, the other jewels, the other perfections of aspect and arrangement that made her personal scheme a success, the *proved* private theory that materials to work with had been all she required and that there were none too precious for her to understand and use—to which might be added lastly, as the strong-scented flower of the total sweetness, an easy command, a high enjoyment, of her crisis. For a crisis she was ready to take it, and this ease it was, doubtless, that helped her, while she waited, to the right assurance, to the right indifference, to the right expression, and above all, as she felt, to the right view of her opportunity for happiness—unless indeed the opportunity itself, rather, were, in its mere strange amplitude, the producing, the precipitating cause. The ordered revellers, rustling and shining, with sweep of train and glitter of star and clink of sword, and yet for all this but so imperfectly articulate, so vaguely vocal—the double stream of the coming and the going, flowing together where she stood, passed her, brushed her, treated her to much crude

contemplation and now and then to a spasm of speech, an offered hand, even in some cases to an unencouraged pause ; but she missed no countenance and invited no protection : she fairly liked to be, so long as she might, just as she was—exposed a little to the public, no doubt, in her unaccompanied state, but, even if it were a bit brazen, careless of queer reflexions on the dull polish of London faces, and exposed, since it was a question of exposure, to much more competent recognitions of her own. She hoped no one would stop—she was positively keeping herself ; it was her idea to mark in a particular manner the importance of something that had just happened. She knew how she should mark it, and what she was doing there made already a beginning.

When she presently therefore from her vantage saw the Prince come back she had an impression of all the place as higher and wider and more appointed for great moments ; with its dome of lustres lifted, its ascents and descents more majestic, its marble tiers more vividly overhung, its numerosity of royalties, foreign and domestic, more unprecedented, its symbolism of "State" hospitality both emphasised and refined. This was doubtless a large consequence of a fairly familiar cause, a considerable inward stir to spring from the mere vision, striking as that might be, of Amerigo in a crowd ; but she had her reasons, she held them there, she carried them in fact, responsibly and overtly, as she carried her head, her high tiara, her folded fan, her indifferent unattended eminence ; and it was when he reached her and she could, taking his arm, show herself as placed in her relation, that she felt supremely justified. It was her notion of course that she gave a glimpse of but few of her grounds for this discrimination—indeed of the most evident alone ; yet she would have been half-willing it should be

guessed how she drew inspiration, drew support, in quantity sufficient for almost anything, from the individual value that, through all the picture, her husband's son-in-law kept for the eye, deriving it from his fine unconscious way, in the swarming social sum, of outshining, overlooking and overtopping. It was as if in separation, even the shortest, she half-forgot or disbelieved how he affected her sight, so that reappearance had in him each time a virtue of its own—a kind of disproportionate intensity suggesting his connexion with occult sources of renewal. What did he do when he was away from her that made him always come back only looking, as she would have called it, "more so"? Superior to any shade of *cabotinage*, he yet almost resembled an actor who, between his moments on the stage, revisits his dressing-room, and, before the glass, pressed by his need of effect, retouches his make-up. The Prince was at present for instance, though he had quitted her but ten minutes before, still more than then the person it pleased her to be left with—a truth that had all its force for her while he made her his care for their conspicuous return together to the upper rooms. Conspicuous beyond any wish they could entertain was what, poor wonderful man, he couldn't help making it; and when she raised her eyes again, on the ascent, to Bob Assingham, still aloft in his gallery and still looking down at her, she was aware that, in spite of hovering and warning inward voices, she even enjoyed the testimony rendered by his lonely vigil to the lustre she reflected.

He was always lonely at great parties, the dear Colonel—it wasn't in such places that the seed he sowed at home was ever reaped by him; but nobody could have seemed to mind it less, to brave it with more bronzed indifference; so markedly that he moved about less like one of the guests than like

some quite presentable person in charge of the police arrangements or the electric light. To Mrs. Verver, as will be seen, he represented, with the perfect good faith of his apparent blankness, something definite enough ; though her bravery was not thereby too blighted for her to feel herself calling him to witness that the only witchcraft her companion had used, within the few minutes, was that of attending Maggie, who had withdrawn from the scene, to her carriage. Notified at all events of Fanny's probable presence, Charlotte was for a while after this divided between the sense of it as a fact somehow to reckon with and deal with, which was a perception that made in its degree for the prudence, the pusillanimity of postponement, of avoidance—and a quite other feeling, an impatience that presently ended by prevailing, an eagerness, really, to *be* suspected, sounded, veritably arraigned, if only that she might have the bad moment over, if only that she might prove to herself, let alone to Mrs Assingham also, that she could convert it to good ; if only in short to be " square," as they said, with her question. For herself indeed particularly it wasn't a question ; but something in her bones told her that Fanny would treat it as one, and there was truly nothing that from this friend she wasn't bound in decency to take. She might hand things back with every tender precaution, with acknowledgments and assurances, but she owed it to them in any case, and owed it to all Mrs. Assingham had done for her, not to get rid of them without having well unwrapped them and turned them over.

To-night, as happened—and she recognised it more and more, with the ebbing minutes, as an influence of everything about her—to-night exactly she would, no doubt, since she knew why, be as firm as she might at any near moment again hope to be for going through that process with the right temper and tone.

She said after a little to the Prince, "Stay with me; let no one take you; for I want her, yes, I do want her, to see us together, and the sooner the better" —said it to keep her hand on him through constant diversions, and made him in fact by saying it profess a momentary vagueness. She had to explain to him that it was Fanny Assingham she wanted to see—who clearly would be there, since the Colonel never either stirred without her or, once arrived, concerned himself for her fate; and she had further, after Amerigo had met her with "See us together? why in the world? hasn't she often seen us together?" to inform him that what had elsewhere and otherwise happened didn't now matter and that she at any rate well knew for the occasion what she was about. "You're strange, cara mia," he consentingly enough dropped; but, for whatever strangeness, he kept her, as they circulated, from being waylaid, even remarking to her afresh, as he had often done before, on the help rendered in such situations by the intrinsic oddity of the London "squash," a thing of vague slow senseless eddies, revolving as in fear of some menace of conversation suspended over it, the drop of which, with a consequent refreshing splash or spatter, yet never took place. Of course she was strange; this, as they went, Charlotte knew for herself: how could she be anything else when the situation holding her, and holding *him*, for that matter, just as much, had so the stamp of it? She had already accepted her consciousness, as we have already noted, that a crisis for them all was in the air; and when such hours weren't depressing, which was the form indeed in which she had mainly known them, they were apparently in a high degree exhilarating.

Later on, in a corner to which, at sight of an empty sofa, Mrs. Assingham had, after a single attentive

arrest, led her with a certain earnestness, this vision of the critical was much more sharpened than blurred. Fanny had taken it from her : yes, she was there with Amerigo alone, Maggie having come with them and then, within ten minutes, changed her mind, repented and departed. " So you're staying on together without her ? " the elder woman had asked ; and it was Charlotte's answer to this that had determined for them, quite indeed according to the latter's expectation, the need of some seclusion and her companion's pounce at the sofa. They were staying on together alone, and—oh distinctly !—it was alone that Maggie had driven away, her father, as usual, not having managed to come. " ' As usual '——? " Mrs. Assingham had seemed to wonder ; Mr. Verver's reluctances not having, she in fact quite intimated, hitherto struck her. Charlotte responded at any rate that his indisposition to go out had lately much increased—even though to-night, as she admitted, he had pleaded his not feeling well. Maggie had wished to stay with him —for the Prince and she, dining out, had afterwards called in Portland Place, whence, in the event, they had brought her, Charlotte, on. Maggie had come but to oblige her father—she had urged the two others to go without her ; then she had yielded for the time to Mr. Verver's persuasion. But here, when they had, after the long wait in the carriage, fairly got in ; here, once up the stairs and with the rooms before them, remorse had ended by seizing her : she had listened to no other remonstrance, and at present therefore, as Charlotte put it, the two were doubtless making together a little party at home. But it was all right—so Charlotte also put it : there was nothing in the world they liked better than these snatched felicities, little parties, long talks, with " I'll come to you to-morrow," and " No, I'll come to *you*," make-believe renewals of their old life. They were fairly

at times, the dear things, like children playing at paying visits, playing at "Mr. Thompson and Mrs. Fane," each hoping that the other would really stay to tea. Charlotte was sure she should find Maggie there on getting home—a remark in which Mrs. Verver's immediate response to her friend's inquiry had culminated. She had thus on the spot the sense of having given her plenty to think about, and that moreover of liking to see it even better than she had expected. She had plenty to think about herself, and there was already something in Fanny that made it seem still more.

"You say your husband's ill? He felt too ill to come?"

"No, my dear—I think not. If he had been too ill I wouldn't have left him."

"And yet Maggie was worried?" Mrs. Assingham asked.

"She worries easily, you know. She's afraid of influenza—of which he has had at different times several attacks, though never with the least gravity."

"But you're not afraid of it?"

Charlotte had for a moment a pause; it had continued to come to her that really to have her case "out," as they said, with the person in the world to whom her most intimate difficulties had oftenest referred themselves, would help her on the whole more than hinder; and under that feeling *all* her opportunity, with nothing kept back, with a thing or two perhaps even thrust forward, seemed temptingly to open. Besides, didn't Fanny at bottom half-expect, absolutely at the bottom half-*want*, things?—so that she'd be disappointed if, after what must just have occurred for her, she didn't get something to put between the teeth of her so restless rumination, that cultivation of the fear, of which our young woman had already had glimpses, that she might have "gone

too far" in her irrepressible interest in other lives. What had just happened—it pieced itself together for Charlotte—was that the Assingham *sposi*, drifting like every one else, had had somewhere in the gallery, in the rooms, an accidental concussion; had it after the Colonel, over his balustrade, had observed, in the favouring high light, her public junction with the Prince. His very dryness in this encounter would have, as always, struck a spark from his wife's curiosity, and, familiar, on his side, with all that she saw in things, he must have thrown her, as a fine little bone to pick, some report of the way one of her young friends was "going on" with another. He knew perfectly—such at least was Charlotte's liberal assumption—that she wasn't going on with any one, but she also knew that, given the circumstances, she was inevitably to be sacrificed, in some form or another, to the humorous intercourse of the inimitable pair. The Prince meanwhile had also, under coercion, sacrificed her; the Ambassador had come up to him with a message from Royalty, to whom he was led away; after which she had talked for five minutes with Sir John Brinder, who had been of the Ambassador's company and who had rather artlessly remained with her. Fanny had then arrived in sight of them at the same moment as some one else she didn't know, some one who knew Mrs. Assingham and also knew Sir John. Charlotte had left it to her friend's competence to throw the two others immediately together and to find a way for entertaining her in closer quarters. This was the little history of the vision in her that was now rapidly helping her to recognise a precious chance, the chance that mightn't again soon be so good for the vivid making of a point. Her point was before her; it was sharp, bright, true; above all it was her own. She had reached it quite by herself; no one, not even Amerigo—Amerigo

least of all, who would have nothing to do with it—had given her aid. To make it now with force for Fanny Assingham's benefit would see her further, in the direction in which the light had dawned, than any other spring she should doubtless yet awhile be able to press. The direction was that of her greater freedom—which was all in the world she had in mind. Her opportunity had accordingly, after a few minutes of Mrs. Assingham's almost imprudently interested expression of face, positively acquired such a price for her that she may for ourselves, while the intensity lasted, rather resemble a person holding out a small mirror at arm's length and consulting it with a special turn of the head. It was in a word with this value of her chance that she was intelligently playing when she said in answer to Fanny's last question: "Don't you remember what you told me, on the occasion of something or other, the other day? That you believe there's nothing I'm afraid of? So, my dear, don't ask me!"

"Mayn't I ask you," Mrs. Assingham returned, "how the case stands with your poor husband?"

"Certainly, dear. Only when you ask me as if I mightn't perhaps know what to think, it seems to me best to let you see that I know perfectly what to think."

Mrs. Assingham had a wait, then, blinking a little, she took her risk. "You didn't think that if it was a question of any one's returning to him in his trouble it would be better you yourself should have gone?"

Well, Charlotte's answer to this inquiry visibly shaped itself in the interest of the highest considerations. The highest considerations were good humour, candour, clearness and, obviously, the *real* truth. "If we couldn't be perfectly frank and dear with each other it would be ever so much better, wouldn't it? that we shouldn't talk about anything at all; which

however would be dreadful—and we certainly at any rate haven't yet come to it. You can ask me anything under the sun you like, because, don't you see? you can't upset me."

"I'm sure, my dear Charlotte," Fanny Assingham laughed, "I don't want to upset you."

"Indeed, love, you simply *couldn't* even if you thought it necessary—that's all I mean. Nobody could, for it belongs to my situation that I'm, by no merit of my own, just fixed—fixed as fast as a pin stuck up to its head in a cushion. I'm placed—I can't imagine any one *more* placed. There I *am*!"

Fanny had indeed never listened to emphasis more firmly applied, and it brought into her own eyes, though she had reasons for striving to keep them from betrayals, a sort of anxiety of intelligence. "I daresay—but your statement of your position, however you see it, isn't an answer to my inquiry. I confess it seems to me at the same time," Mrs. Assingham added, "to give but the more reason for it. You speak of our being 'frank.' How can we possibly be anything else? If Maggie has gone off through finding herself too distressed to stay, and if she's willing to leave you and her husband to show here without her, aren't the grounds of her preoccupation more or less discussable?"

"If they're not," Charlotte replied, "it's only from their being in a way too evident. They're not grounds for me—they weren't when I accepted Adam's preference that I should come to-night without him: just as I accept absolutely, as a fixed rule, *all* his preferences. But that of course doesn't alter the fact that my husband's daughter rather than his wife should have felt *she* could after all be the one to stay with him, the one to make the sacrifice of this hour—seeing especially that the daughter has a husband of her own in the field." With which she produced, as it

were, her explanation. "I've simply to see the truth of the matter—see that Maggie thinks more on the whole of fathers than of husbands. And my situation is such," she went on, "that this becomes immediately, don't you understand? a thing I have to count with."

Mrs. Assingham, vaguely heaving, panting a little but trying not to show it, turned about, from some inward spring, in her seat. "If you mean such a thing as that she doesn't adore the Prince——!"

"I don't say she doesn't adore him. What I say is that she doesn't think of him. One of those conditions doesn't always at all stages involve the other. This is just *how* she adores him," Charlotte said. "And what reason is there in the world, after all, why he and I shouldn't, as you say, show together? We've shown together, my dear," she smiled, "before."

Her friend, for a little, only looked at her—speaking then with abruptness. "You ought to be absolutely happy. You live with such *good* people."

The effect of it, as well, was an arrest for Charlotte; whose face however, all of whose fine and slightly hard radiance, it had the next instant caused further to brighten. "Does one ever put into words anything so fatuously rash? It's a thing that must be said, in prudence, *for* one—by somebody who's so good as to take the responsibility: the more that it gives one always a chance to show one's best manners by not contradicting it. Certainly, you'll never have the distress, or whatever, of hearing me complain."

"Truly, my dear, I hope in all conscience not!"—and the elder woman's spirit found relief in a laugh more resonant than was quite advised by their pursuit of privacy.

To this demonstration her friend gave no heed. "With all our absence after marriage, and with the

separation from her produced in particular by our so many months in America, Maggie has still arrears, still losses to make up—still the need of showing how, for so long, she simply kept missing him. She missed his company—a large allowance of which is, in spite of everything else, of the first necessity to her. So she puts it in when she can—a little here, a little there, and it ends by making up a considerable amount. The fact of our distinct establishments—which has all the same everything in its favour," Charlotte hastened to declare—" makes her really see more of him than when they had the same house. To make sure she doesn't fail of it she's always arranging for it—which she didn't have to do while they lived together. But she likes to arrange," Charlotte steadily proceeded ; " it peculiarly suits her ; and the result of our separate households is really, for them, more contact and more intimacy. To-night for instance has been practically an arrangement. She likes him best alone. And it's the way," said our young woman, " in which he best likes *her*. It's what I mean therefore by being ' placed.' And the great thing is, as they say, to ' know ' one's place. Doesn't it all strike you," she wound up, " as rather placing the Prince too ? "

Fanny Assingham had at this moment the sense as of a large heaped dish presented to her intelligence and inviting it to a feast—so thick were the notes of intention in this remarkable speech. But she also felt that to plunge at random, to help herself too freely, would—apart from there not being at such a moment time for it—tend to jostle the ministering hand, confound the array and, more vulgarly speaking, make a mess. She picked out after consideration a solitary plum. " So placed that *you* have to arrange ? "

" Certainly I have to arrange."

"And the Prince also—if the effect for him is the same?"

"Really I think not less."

"And does he arrange," Mrs. Assingham asked, "to make up *his* arrears?" The question had risen to her lips—it was as if another morsel, on the dish, had tempted her. The sound of it at once struck her own ear as giving out more of her thought than she had as yet intended; but she quickly saw that she must follow it up, at any risk, with simplicity, and that what was simplest was the ease of boldness. "Make them up, I mean, by coming to see *you*?"

Charlotte replied however without, as her friend would have phrased it, turning a hair. She shook her head, but it was beautifully gentle. "He never comes."

"Oh!" said Fanny Assingham: with which she felt a little stupid.

"There it is. He might so well, you know, otherwise."

"'Otherwise'?"—and Fanny was still vague.

It passed this time over her companion, whose eyes, wandering to a distance, found themselves held. The Prince was at hand again; the Ambassador was still at his side; they were stopped a moment by a uniformed personage, a little old man, of apparently the highest military character, bristling with medals and orders. This gave Charlotte time to go on. "He has not been for three months." And then as with her friend's last word in her ear: "'Otherwise'—yes. He arranges otherwise. And in my position," she added, "I might too. It's too absurd we shouldn't meet."

"You've met, I gather," said Fanny Assingham, "to-night."

"Yes—as far as that goes. But what I mean is

that I might—placed for it as we both are—go to see *him*."

"And *do* you?" Fanny asked with almost mistaken solemnity.

The perception of this excess made Charlotte, whether for gravity or for irony, hang fire a minute. "I *have* been. But that's nothing," she said, "in itself, and I tell you of it only to show you how our situation works. It essentially becomes one, a situation, for both of us. The Prince's however is his own affair—I meant but to speak of mine."

"Your situation's perfect," Mrs. Assingham presently declared.

"I don't say it isn't. Taken in fact all round I think it is. And I don't, as I tell you, complain of it. The only thing is that I have to act as it demands of me."

"To 'act'?" said Mrs. Assingham with an irrepressible quaver.

"Isn't it acting, my dear, to accept it? I do accept it. What do you want me to do less?"

"I want you to believe that you're a very fortunate person."

"Do you call that *less*?" Charlotte asked with a smile. "From the point of view of my freedom I call it more. Let it take, my position, any name you like."

"Don't let it at any rate"—and Mrs. Assingham's impatience prevailed at last over her presence of mind—"don't let it make you think too much of your freedom."

"I don't know what you call too much—for how can I not see it as it is? You'd see your own quickly enough if the Colonel gave you the same liberty—and I haven't to tell you, with your so much greater knowledge of everything, what it is that gives such liberty most. For yourself personally of course," Charlotte went on, "you only know the state of

neither needing it nor missing it. Your husband doesn't treat you as of less importance to him than some other woman."

"Ah don't talk to me of other women!" Fanny now overtly panted. "Do you call Mr. Verver's perfectly natural interest in his daughter——?"

"The greatest affection of which he's capable?"—Charlotte took it up in all readiness. "I do distinctly—and in spite of my having done all I could think of to make him capable of a greater. I've done, earnestly, everything I could—I've made it, month after month, my study. But I haven't succeeded—that has been vividly brought home to me to-night. However," she pursued, "I've hoped against hope, for I recognise that, as I told you at the time, I was duly warned." And then as she met in her friend's face the absence of any such remembrance: "He did tell me he wanted me just *because* I could be useful about her." With which Charlotte broke into a wonderful smile. "So you see I *am*!"

It was on Fanny Assingham's lips for the moment to reply that this was on the contrary what she saw least of all; she came in fact within an ace of saying: "You strike me as having quite failed to help his idea to work—since by your account Maggie has him not less, but so much more, on her mind. How in the world, with so much of a remedy, comes there to remain so much of what was to be obviated?" But she saved herself in time, conscious above all that she was in presence of still deeper things than she had yet dared to fear, that there was "more in it" than any admission she had made represented—and she had held herself familiar with admissions: so that, not to seem to understand where she couldn't accept, and not to seem to accept where she couldn't approve, and could still less, with precipitation, advise, she invoked the mere appearance of casting no weight whatever

into the scales of her young friend's consistency. The only thing was that, as she was quickly enough to feel, she invoked it rather to excess. It brought her, her invocation, too abruptly to her feet. She brushed away everything. "I can't conceive, my dear, what you're talking about!"

Charlotte promptly rose then, as might be, to meet it, and her colour for the first time perceptibly heightened. She looked, for the minute, as her companion had looked — as if twenty protests, blocking each other's way, had surged up within her. But when Charlotte had to make a selection it was always the most effective possible. It was happy now, above all, for being made not in anger but in sorrow. "You give me up then?"

"Give you up——?"

"You forsake me at the hour of my life when it seems to me I most deserve a friend's loyalty? If you do you're not just, Fanny; you're even, I think," she went on, "rather cruel; and it's least of all worthy of you to seem to wish to quarrel with me in order to cover your desertion." She spoke, at the same time, with the noblest moderation of tone, and the image of high pale lighted disappointment she meanwhile presented, as of a creature patient and lonely in her splendour, was an impression so firmly imposed that she could fill her measure to the brim and yet enjoy the last word, as it is called in such cases, with a perfection void of any vulgarity of triumph. She merely completed, for truth's sake, her demonstration. "What's a quarrel with me but a quarrel with my right to recognise the conditions of my bargain? But I can carry them out alone," she said as she turned away. She turned to meet the Ambassador and the Prince, who, their colloquy with their Field-Marshal ended, were now at hand and had already, between them, she was aware, addressed her

a remark that failed to penetrate the golden glow in which her intelligence was temporarily bathed. She had made her point, the point she had foreseen she must make; she had made it thoroughly and once for all, so that no more making was required; and her success was reflected in the faces of the two men of distinction before her, unmistakably moved to admiration by her exceptional radiance. She at first but watched this reflexion, taking no note of any less adequate form of it possibly presented by poor Fanny —poor Fanny left to stare at her incurred "score," chalked up in so few strokes on the wall; then she made out what the Ambassador was saying in French, what he was apparently repeating to her.

"A desire for your presence, Madame, has been expressed *en très-haut lieu*, and I've let myself in for the responsibility, to say nothing of the honour, of seeing, as the most respectful of your friends, that so august an impatience is not kept waiting." The greatest possible Personage had in short, according to the odd formula of societies subject to the greatest personages possible, "sent for" her, and she asked, in her surprise, "What in the world does he want to do to me?" only to know, without looking, that Fanny's bewilderment was called to a still larger application, and to hear the Prince say with authority, indeed with a certain prompt dryness: "You must go immediately — it's a summons." The Ambassador, using authority as well, had already somehow possessed himself of her hand, which he drew into his arm, and she was further conscious as she went off with him that, though still speaking for her benefit, Amerigo had turned to Fanny Assingham. He would explain afterwards—besides which she would understand for herself. To Fanny, however, he had laughed—as a mark, it seemed, that for this infallible friend no explanation at all would be necessary.

II

It may be recorded none the less that the Prince was the next moment to see how little any such assumption was founded. Alone with him now Mrs. Assingham was incorruptible. "They send for Charlotte through *you*?"

"No, my dear; as you see, through the Ambassador."

"Ah but the Ambassador and you, for the last quarter of an hour, have been for them as one. He's *your* ambassador." It may indeed be further mentioned that the more Fanny looked at it the more she saw in it. "They've connected her with you—she's treated as your appendage."

"Oh my 'appendage,'" the Prince amusingly exclaimed—"cara mia, what a name! She's treated rather say as my ornament and my glory. And it's so remarkable a case for a mother-in-law that you surely can't find fault with it."

"You've ornaments enough, it seems to me—as you've certainly glories enough—without her. And she's not the least little bit," Mrs. Assingham observed, "your mother-in-law. In such a matter a shade of difference is enormous. She's no relation to you whatever, and if she's known in high quarters but as going about with you, then—then——!" She failed, however, as from positive intensity of vision.

"Then, then what?" he asked with perfect good nature.

"She had better in such a case not be known at all."

"But I assure you I never, just now, so much as mentioned her. Do you suppose I asked them," said the young man, still amused, "if they didn't want to see her? You surely don't need to be shown that Charlotte speaks for herself—that she does so above all on such an occasion as this and looking as she does to-night. How, so looking, can she pass unnoticed? How can she not have 'success'? Besides," he added while she watched his face, letting him say what he would, as if but wanting to see how he would say it, "besides, there *is* always the fact that we're of the same connexion, of—what is your word?—the same 'concern.' We're certainly not, with the relation of our respective *sposi*, simply formal acquaintances. We're in the same boat"—and the Prince smiled with a candour that added an accent to his emphasis.

Fanny Assingham was full of the special sense of his manner: it caused her to turn for a moment's refuge to a corner of her general consciousness in which she could say to herself that she was glad *she* wasn't in love with such a man. As with Charlotte, just before, she was embarrassed by the difference between what she took in and what she could say, what she felt and what she could show. "It only appears to me of great importance that—now that you all seem more settled here—Charlotte should be known, for any presentation, any further circulation or introduction, as in particular her husband's wife; known in the least possible degree as anything else. I don't know what you mean by the 'same' boat. Charlotte is naturally in Mr. Verver's boat."

"And pray am *I* not in Mr. Verver's boat too?

Why but for Mr. Verver's boat I should have been by this time "—and his quick Italian gesture, an expressive direction and motion of his forefinger, pointed to deepest depths—"away down, down, down." She knew of course what he meant—how it had taken his father-in-law's great fortune, and taken no small slice, to surround him with an element in which, all too fatally weighted as he had originally been, he could pecuniarily float ; and with this reminder other things came to her—how strange it was that, with all allowance for their merit, it should befall some people to be so inordinately valued, quoted, as they said in the stock-market, so high, and how still stranger perhaps that there should be cases in which, for some reason, one didn't mind the so frequently marked absence in them of the purpose really to represent their price. She was thinking, feeling, at any rate, for herself ; she was thinking that the pleasure *she* could take in this specimen of the class didn't suffer from his consent to be merely made bouyant : partly because it was one of those pleasures (he inspired them) that, by their nature, *couldn't* suffer, to whatever proof they were put ; and partly because, besides, he after all visibly had on his conscience some sort of return for services rendered. He was a huge expense assuredly—but it had been up to now her conviction that his idea was to behave beautifully enough to make the beauty well-nigh an equivalent. And that he had carried out his idea, carried it out by continuing to lead the life, to breathe the air, very nearly to think the thoughts, that best suited his wife and her father—this she had till lately enjoyed the comfort of so distinctly perceiving as to have even been moved more than once to express to him the happiness it gave her. He had that in his favour as against other matters ; yet it discouraged her too, and rather oddly, that he should so keep moving, and be

able to show her that he moved, on the firm ground of the truth. His acknowledgment of obligation was far from unimportant, but she could find in his grasp of the real itself a kind of ominous intimation. The intimation appeared to peep at her even out of his next word, lightly as he produced it.

"Isn't it rather as if we had, Charlotte and I, for bringing us together, a benefactor in common?" And the effect for his good friend was still further to be deepened. "I somehow feel half the time as if he were *her* father-in-law too. It's as if he had saved us both—which is a fact in our lives, or at any rate in our hearts, to make of itself a link. Don't you remember"—he kept it up—"how, the day she suddenly turned up for you, just before my wedding, we so frankly and funnily talked, in her presence, of the advisability for her of some good marriage?" And then as his friend's face, in her extremity, quite again as with Charlotte, but continued to fly the black flag of general repudiation: "Well, we really began then, as it seems to me, the work of placing her where she is. We were wholly right—and so was she. That it *was* exactly the thing is shown by its success. We recommended a good marriage at almost any price, so to speak, and, taking us at our word, she has made the very best. That was really what we meant, wasn't it? Only—what she has got—something thoroughly good. It would be difficult, it seems to me, for her to have anything better—once you allow her the way it's to be taken. Of course if you don't allow her *that* the case is different. Her offset is a certain decent freedom—which I judge she'll be quite contented with. You may say that will be very good of her, but she strikes me as perfectly humble about it. She proposes neither to claim it nor to use it with any sort of *retentissement*. She would enjoy it, I think, quite as quietly as it might be given. The 'boat' you

see"—the Prince explained it no less considerately and lucidly—"is a good deal tied up at the dock, or anchored, if you like, out in the stream. I have to jump out from time to time to stretch my legs, and you'll probably perceive, if you give it your attention, that Charlotte really can't help occasionally doing the same. It isn't even a question, sometimes, of one's getting to the dock—one has to take a header and splash about in the water. Call our having remained here together to-night, call the accident of my having put them, put our illustrious friends there, on my companion's track—for I grant you this as a practical result of our combination—call the whole thing one of the harmless little plunges, off the deck, inevitable for each of us. Why not take them, when they occur, *as* inevitable—and above all as not endangering life or limb? We shan't drown, we shan't sink—at least I can answer for myself. Mrs. Verver too moreover—to do her justice—visibly knows how to swim."

He could easily go on, for she didn't interrupt him; Fanny felt now that she wouldn't have interrupted him for the world. She found his eloquence precious; there wasn't a drop of it that she didn't in a manner catch, as it came, for immediate bottling, for future preservation. The crystal flash of her innermost attention really received it on the spot, and she had even already the vision of how, in the snug laboratory of her afterthought, she should be able chemically to analyse it. There were moments positively, still beyond this, when, with the meeting of their eyes, something as yet unnameable came out for her in his look, when something strange and subtle and at variance with his words, something that *gave them away*, glimmered deep down, as an appeal, almost an incredible one, to her finer comprehension. What, inconceivably, was it like? Wasn't it, however

gross such a rendering of anything so occult, fairly like a quintessential wink, a hint of the possibility of their *really* treating their subject—of course on some better occasion—and thereby, as well, finding it much more interesting? If this far red spark, which might have been figured by her mind as the head-light of an approaching train seen through the length of a tunnel, was not, on her side, an *ignis fatuus*, a mere subjective phenomenon, it twinkled there at the direct expense of what the Prince was inviting her to understand. Meanwhile too, however, and unmistakably, the real treatment of their subject did, at a given moment, sound. This was when he proceeded, with just the same perfect possession of his thought—on the manner of which he couldn't have improved—to complete his successful simile by another, in fact by just the supreme, touch, the touch for which it had till now been waiting. "For Mrs. Verver to be known to people so intensely and exclusively as her husband's wife something is wanted that, you know, they haven't exactly got. He should manage to be known—or at least to be seen—a little more as his wife's husband. You surely must by this time have seen for yourself that he has his own habits and his own ways, and that he makes, more and more—as of course he has a perfect right to do—his own discriminations. He's so perfect, so ideal a father, and, doubtless largely by that very fact, so generous, so comfortable, so admirable a father-in-law, that I should really feel it base to avail myself of any standpoint whatever to criticise him. To *you* nevertheless I may make just one remark; for you're not stupid—you always understand so blessedly what one means."

He paused an instant, as if even this one remark might be difficult for him should she give no sign of encouraging him to produce it. Nothing would have induced her, however, to encourage him; she was now

conscious of having never in her life stood so still or sat, inwardly, as it were, so tight ; she felt like the horse of the adage, brought—and brought by her own fault—to the water, but strong, for the occasion, in the one fact that she couldn't be forced to drink. Invited, in other words, to understand, she held her breath for fear of showing she did, and this for the excellent reason that she was at last fairly afraid to. It was sharp for her, at the same time, that she was certain, in advance, of his remark ; that she heard it before it had sounded, that she already tasted in fine the bitterness it would have for her special sensibility. But her companion, from an inward and different need of his own, was presently not deterred by her silence. "What I really don't see is why, from his own point of view—given, that is, his conditions, so fortunate as they stood—he should have wished to marry at all." There it was then—exactly what she knew would come, and exactly, for reasons that seemed now to thump at her heart, as distressing to her. Yet she was resolved meanwhile not to suffer, as they used to say of the martyrs, then and there ; not to suffer, odiously, helplessly, in public—which could be prevented but by her breaking off with whatever inconsequence ; by her treating their discussion as ended and getting away. She suddenly wanted to go home—much as she had wanted, an hour or two before, to come. She wanted to leave well behind her both her question and the couple in whom it had abruptly taken such vivid form—but it was dreadful to have the appearance of disconcerted flight. Discussion had of itself, to her sense, become danger—such light, as from open crevices, it let in ; and the overt recognition of danger was worse than anything else. The worst in fact came while she was thinking how she could retreat and still not overtly recognise. Her face had betrayed her trouble, and with that she

was lost. "I'm afraid, however," the Prince said, "that I, for some reason, distress you—for which I beg your pardon. We've always talked so well together—it has been, from the beginning, the greatest pull for me." Nothing so much as such a tone could have quickened her collapse; she felt he had her now at his mercy, and he showed, as he went on, that he knew it. "We shall talk again, all the same, better than ever—I depend on it too much. Don't you remember what I told you so definitely one day before my marriage?—that, moving as I did in so many ways among new things, mysteries, conditions, expectations, assumptions different from any I had known, I looked to you, as my original sponsor, my fairy godmother, to see me through. I beg you to believe," he added, "that I look to you yet."

His very insistence had fortunately the next moment affected her as bringing her help; with which at least she could hold up her head to speak. "Ah, you *are* through—you were through long ago. Or if you aren't you ought to be."

"Well then if I ought to be it's all the more reason why you should continue to help me. Because very distinctly I assure you I'm not. The new things—or ever so many of them—are still for me new things; the mysteries and expectations and assumptions still contain an immense element that I've failed to puzzle out. As we've happened so luckily to find ourselves again really taking hold together, you must let me, as soon as possible, come to see you; you must give me a good kind hour. If you refuse it me"—and he addressed himself to her continued reserve—"I shall feel that you deny, with a stony stare, your responsibility."

At this, as from a sudden shake, her reserve proved a weak vessel. She could bear her own, her private

reference to the weight on her mind, but the touch of another hand made it too horribly press. "Oh I deny responsibility—to *you*. So far as I ever had it I've done with it."

He had been all the while beautifully smiling; but she made his look now penetrate her again more. "As to whom then do you confess it?"

"Ah mio caro, that's—if to any one—my own business!"

He continued to look at her hard. "You give me up then?"

It was what Charlotte had asked her ten minutes before, and its coming from him so much in the same way shook her in her place. She was on the point of replying "Do you and she agree together for what you'll say to me?"—but she was glad afterwards to have checked herself in time, little as her actual answer had perhaps bettered it. "I think I don't know what to make of you."

"You must receive me at least," he said.

"Oh please not till I'm ready for you!"—and though she found a laugh for it she had to turn away. She had never turned away from him before, and it was quite positively for her as if she were altogether afraid of him.

III

LATER on, when their hired brougham had, with the long vociferation that tormented her impatience, been extricated from the endless rank, she rolled into the London night, beside her husband, as into a sheltering darkness where she could muffle herself and draw breath. She had stood for the previous hour in a merciless glare, beaten upon, stared out of countenance, it fairly seemed to her, by intimations of her mistake. For what she was most immediately feeling was that she *had* in the past been active for these people to ends that were now bearing fruit and that might yet bear a larger crop. She but brooded at first in her corner of the carriage : it was like burying her exposed face, a face too helplessly exposed, in the cool lap of the common indifference, of the dispeopled streets, of the closed shops and darkened houses seen through the window of the brougham, a world mercifully unconscious and unreproachful. It wouldn't, like the world she had just left, know sooner or later what she had done, or would know it only if the final consequence should be some quite overwhelming publicity. She fixed this possibility itself so hard, however, for a few moments, that the misery of her fear produced the next minute a reaction ; and when the carriage happened, while it grazed a turn, to catch the straight shaft from the lamp of a policeman in the act of playing his inquisitive flash over an

opposite house-front, she let herself wince at being thus incriminated only that she might protest, not less quickly, against mere blind terror. It had become, for the occasion, preposterously terror—of which she must shake herself free before she could properly measure her ground. The perception of this necessity had in truth soon aided her; since she found on trying that, lurid as her prospect might hover there, she could none the less give it no name. The sense of seeing was strong in her, but she clutched at the comfort of not being sure of what she saw. Not to know what it would represent on a longer view was a help, in turn, to not making out that her hands were embrued; since if she had stood in the position of a producing cause she should surely be less vague about what she had produced. This, further, in its way, was a step toward reflecting that when one's connexion with any matter was too indirect to be traced it might be described also as too slight to be deplored. By the time they were nearing Cadogan Place she had in fact recognised that she couldn't be so curious as she desired without arriving at some conviction of her being as innocent. But there had been a moment in the dim desert of Eaton Square when she broke into speech.

"It's only their defending themselves so much more than they need—it's only *that* that makes me wonder. It's their having so remarkably much to say for themselves."

Her husband had as usual lighted his cigar, remaining apparently as busy with it as she with her agitation. "You mean it makes you feel that *you* have nothing?" To which, as she failed to answer, the Colonel added: "What in the world did you ever suppose was going to happen? The man's in a position in which he has nothing in life to do."

Her silence seemed to characterise this statement

as superficial, and her thoughts, as always in her husband's company, pursued an independent course. He made her, when they were together, talk, but as if for some other person ; who was in fact for the most part herself. Yet she addressed herself with him as she could never have done without him. " He has behaved beautifully—he did from the first. I've thought it all along wonderful of him ; and I've more than once when I've had a chance told him so. Therefore, therefore——! " But it died away as she mused.

" Therefore he has a right, for a change, to kick up his heels ? "

" It isn't a question of course however," she undivertedly went on, " of their behaving beautifully apart. It's a question of their doing as they should when together—which is another matter."

" And how do you think then," the Colonel asked with interest, " that when together they *should* do ? The less they do, one would say, the better—if you see so much in it."

His wife appeared at this to hear him. " I don't see in it what *you'd* see. And don't, my dear," she further answered, " think it necessary to be horrid or low about them. They're the last people really to make anything of that sort come in right."

" I'm surely never horrid or low," he returned, " about any one but my extravagant wife. I can do with all our friends—as I see them myself : what I can't do with is the figures you make of them. And when you take to adding your figures up——! " But he exhaled it again in smoke.

" My additions don't matter when you've not to pay the bill." With which her meditation again bore her through the air. " The great thing was that when it so suddenly came up for her he wasn't afraid. If he had been afraid he could perfectly have prevented

it. And if I had seen he was—if I hadn't seen he wasn't—so," said Mrs. Assingham, "could I. So," she declared, "*would* I. It's perfectly true," she went on—"it was too good a thing for her, such a chance in life, not to be accepted. And I *liked* his not keeping her out of it merely from a fear of his own nature. It was so wonderful it should come to her. The only thing would have been if Charlotte herself couldn't have faced it. Then—if *she* hadn't had confidence—we might have talked. But she had it to any amount."

"Did you ask her how much?" Bob Assingham patiently growled.

He had put the question with no more than his usual modest hope of reward, but he had pressed this time the sharpest spring of response. "Never, never—it wasn't a time to 'ask.' Asking is suggesting—and it wasn't a time to suggest. One had to make up one's mind, as quietly as possible, by what one could judge. And I judge, as I say, that Charlotte felt she could face it. For which she struck me at the time as—for so proud a creature—almost touchingly grateful. The thing I should never forgive her for would be her forgetting to whom it is her thanks have remained most due."

"That is to Mrs. Assingham?"

She said nothing for a little—there were after all alternatives. "Maggie herself of course—astonishing little Maggie."

"Is Maggie then astonishing too?"—and he gloomed out of his window.

His wife, on her side now, as they rolled, projected the same look. "I'm not sure I don't begin to see more in her than—dear little person as I've always thought—I ever supposed there was. I'm not sure that, putting a good many things together, I'm not beginning to make her out rather extraordinary."

"You certainly will if you can," the Colonel resignedly remarked.

Again his companion said nothing; then again she broke out. "In fact—I do begin to feel it—Maggie's the great comfort. I'm getting hold of it. It will be *she* who'll see us through. In fact she'll have to. And she'll be able."

Touch by touch her meditation had completed it, but with a cumulative effect for her husband's general sense of her method that caused him to overflow, whimsically enough, in his corner, into an ejaculation now frequent on his lips for the relief that, especially in communion like the present, it gave him, and that Fanny had critically traced to the quaint example, the aboriginal homeliness, still so delightful, of Mr. Verver. "Oh Lordy, Lordy!"

"If she is, however," Mrs. Assingham continued, "she'll be extraordinary enough—and that's what I'm thinking of. But I'm not indeed so very sure," she added, "of the person to whom Charlotte ought in decency to be most grateful. I mean I'm not sure if that person is even the almost incredible little idealist who has made her his wife."

"I shouldn't think you would be, love," the Colonel with some promptness responded. "Charlotte as the wife of an incredible little idealist——!" His cigar in short once more could alone express it.

"Yet what is that, when one thinks, but just what she struck one as more or less persuaded that she herself was really going to be?"—this memory, for the full view, Fanny found herself also invoking.

It made her companion in truth slightly gape. "An incredible little idealist—Charlotte herself?"

"And she was sincere," his wife simply proceeded —"she was unmistakably sincere. The question is only how much is left of it."

"And that—I see—happens to be another of the

questions you can't ask her. You have to do it all," said Bob Assingham, "as if you were playing some game with its rules drawn up—though who's to come down on you if you break them I don't quite see. Or must you do it in three guesses—like forfeits on Christmas Eve?" To which, as his ribaldry but dropped from her, he further added: "How much of anything will have to be left for you to be able to go on with it?"

"I shall go on," Fanny Assingham a trifle grimly declared, "while there's a scrap as big as your nail. But we're not yet, luckily, reduced only to that." She had another pause, holding the while the thread of that larger perception into which her view of Mrs. Verver's obligation to Maggie had suddenly expanded. "Even if her debt wasn't to the others—even then it ought to be quite sufficiently to the Prince himself to keep her straight. For what really did the Prince do," she asked herself, "but generously trust her? What did he do but take it from her that if she felt herself willing it was because she felt herself strong? That creates for her, upon my word," Mrs. Assingham pursued, "a duty of considering him, of honourably repaying his trust, which—well, which she'll be really a fiend if she doesn't make the law of her conduct. I mean of course his trust that she wouldn't interfere with him—expressed by his holding himself quiet at the critical time."

The brougham was nearing home, and it was perhaps this sense of ebbing opportunity that caused the Colonel's next meditation to flower in a fashion almost surprising to his wife. They were united for the most part but by his exhausted patience; so that indulgent despair was generally at the best his note. He at present however actually compromised with his despair to the extent of practically admitting that he had followed her steps. He literally asked in short

an intelligent, well-nigh a sympathising, question. "Gratitude to the Prince for not having put a spoke in her wheel—*that*, you mean, should, taking it in the right way, be precisely the ballast of her boat?"

"Taking it in the right way." Fanny, catching at this gleam, emphasised the proviso.

"But doesn't it rather depend on what she may most feel to *be* the right way?"

"No—it depends on nothing. Because there's only one way—for duty or delicacy."

"Oh—delicacy!" Bob Assingham rather crudely murmured.

"I mean the highest kind—moral. Charlotte's perfectly capable of appreciating that. By every dictate of moral delicacy she must let him alone."

"Then you've made up your mind it's all poor Charlotte?" he asked with an effect of abruptness.

The effect, whether intended or not, reached her—brought her face short round. It was a touch at which she again lost her balance, at which the bottom somehow dropped out of her recovered comfort. "Then you've made up yours differently? It really struck you that there *is* something?"

The movement itself apparently made him once more stand off. He had felt on his nearer approach the high temperature of the question. "Perhaps that's just what she's doing: showing him how much she's letting him alone—pointing it out to him from day to day."

"Did she point it out by waiting for him to-night on the staircase in the manner you described to me?"

"I really, my dear, described to you a manner?"—the Colonel clearly, from want of habit, scarce recognised himself in the imputation.

"Yes—for once in a way; in those few words we had after you had watched them come up you told me something of what you had seen. You

didn't tell me very much—*that* you couldn't for your life ; but I saw for myself that, strange to say, you had received your impression, and I felt therefore that there must indeed have been something out of the way for you so to betray it." She was fully upon him now, and she confronted him with his proved sensibility to the occasion—confronted him because of her own uneasy need to profit by it. It came over her still more than at the time, it came over her that he had been struck with something, even *he*, poor dear man ; and that for this to have occurred there must have been much to be struck with. She tried in fact to corner him, to pack him insistently down, in the truth of his plain vision, the very plainness of which was its value ; for so recorded, she felt, none of it would escape—she should have it at hand for reference. " Come, my dear—you thought what you thought : in the presence of what you saw you couldn't resist thinking. I don't ask more of it than that. And your idea is worth, this time, quite as much as any of mine—so that you can't pretend as usual that mine has run away with me. I haven't caught up with you. I stay where I am. But I see," she concluded, " where *you* are, and I'm much obliged to you for letting me. You give me a *point de repère* outside myself—which is where I like it. Now I can work round you."

Their conveyance, as she spoke, stopped at their door, and it was on the spot another fact of value for her that her husband, though seated on the side by which they must alight, made no movement. They were in a high degree votaries of the latch-key, so that their household had gone to bed ; and as they were unaccompanied by a footman the coachman waited in peace. It was so indeed that for a minute Bob Assingham waited—conscious of a reason for replying to this address otherwise than by the so

obvious method of turning his back. He didn't turn his face, but stared straight before him, and his wife had already gathered from the fact of his not moving all the proof she could desire—proof, that is, of her own contention. She knew he never cared what she said, and his neglect of his chance to show it was thereby the more eloquent. "Leave it," he at last remarked, "to *them*."

"'Leave it'——?" She wondered.

"Let them alone. They'll manage."

"They'll manage, you mean, to do everything they want? Ah there then you are!"

"They'll manage in their own way," the Colonel almost cryptically repeated.

It had its effect for her: quite apart from its light on the familiar phenomenon of her husband's indurated conscience, it gave her full in her face the particular evocation of which she had made him guilty. It was wonderful, truly then, the evocation. "So cleverly—*that's* your idea?—that no one will be the wiser? It's your idea that we shall have done all that's required of us if we simply protect them?"

The Colonel, still in his place, declined however to be drawn into a statement of his idea. Statements were too much like theories, in which one lost one's way; he only knew what he said, and what he said represented the limited vibration of which his confirmed old toughness had been capable. Still, none the less, he had his point to make—for which he took another instant. But he made it for the third time in the same fashion. "They'll manage in their own way." With which he got out.

Oh yes, at this, for his companion, it had indeed its effect, and while he mounted their steps she but stared, without following him, at his opening of their door. Their hall was lighted, and as he stood in the aperture looking back at her, his tall lean figure out-

lined in darkness and with his crush-hat, according to his wont, worn cavalierly, rather diabolically, askew, he seemed to prolong the sinister emphasis of his meaning. In general, on these returns, he came back for her when he had prepared their entrance ; so that it was now as if he were ashamed to face her in closer quarters. He looked at her across the interval, and, still in her seat, weighing his charge, she felt her whole view of everything flare up. Wasn't it simply what had been written in the Prince's own face *beneath* what he was saying ?—didn't it correspond with the mocking presence there that she had had her troubled glimpse of ? Wasn't, in fine, the pledge that they would " manage in their own way " the thing he had been feeling for his chance to invite her to take from him ? Her husband's tone somehow fitted Amerigo's look—the one that had for her so strangely peeped from behind over the shoulder of the one in front. She hadn't then read it—but wasn't she reading it when she now saw in it his surmise that she was perhaps to be squared ? She wasn't to be squared, and while she heard her companion call across to her " Well, what's the matter ? " she also took time to remind herself that she had decided she couldn't be frightened. The " matter " ?—why it was sufficiently the matter, on all this, that she felt a little sick. For it wasn't the Prince she had been prepared to regard as primarily the shaky one. Shakiness in Charlotte she had at the most perhaps postulated—it would be, she somehow felt, more easy to deal with. Therefore if *he* had come so far it was a different pair of sleeves. There was nothing to choose between them. It made her so helpless that, as the time passed without her alighting, the Colonel came back and fairly drew her forth ; after which, on the pavement, under the street-lamp, their very silence might have been the

mark of something grave—their silence eked out for her by his giving her his arm and their then crawling up their steps quite mildly and unitedly together, like some old Darby and Joan who have had a disappointment. It almost resembled a return from a funeral—unless indeed it resembled more the hushed approach to a house of mourning. What indeed had she come home for but to inter, as decently as possible, her mistake ?

IV

It appeared thus that they might enjoy together extraordinary freedom, the two friends, from the moment they should understand their position aright. With the Prince himself, from an early stage, not unnaturally, Charlotte had made a great point of their so understanding it; she had found frequent occasion to describe to him this necessity, and, her resignation tempered, or her intelligence at least quickened, by irrepressible irony, she applied at different times different names to the propriety of their case. The wonderful thing was that her sense of propriety had been from the first especially alive about it. There were hours when she spoke of their taking refuge in what she called the commonest tact —as if this principle alone would suffice to light their way; there were others when it might have seemed, to listen to her, that their course would demand of them the most anxious study and the most independent, not to say original, interpretation of signs. She talked now as if it were indicated at every turn by finger-posts of almost ridiculous prominence; she talked again as if it lurked in devious ways and were to be tracked through bush and briar; and she even on opportunity delivered herself in the sense that, as their situation was unprecedented, so their heaven was without stars. "'Do'?" she once had echoed to him as the upshot of passages covertly,

though briefly, occurring between them on her return from the visit to America that had immediately succeeded her marriage, determined for her by this event as promptly as an excursion of the like strange order had been prescribed in his own case. "Isn't the immense, the really quite matchless beauty of our position that we have to 'do' nothing in life at all?—nothing except the usual necessary everyday thing which consists in one's not being more of a fool than one can help. That's all—but that's as true for one time as for another. There has been plenty of 'doing,' and there will doubtless be plenty still; but it's all theirs, every inch of it; it's all a matter of what they've done *to* us." And she showed how the question had therefore been only of their taking everything as everything came, and all as quietly as might be. Nothing stranger surely had ever happened to a conscientious, a well-meaning, a perfectly passive pair: no more extraordinary decree had ever been launched against such victims than this of forcing them against their will into a relation of mutual close contact that they had done everything to avoid.

She was to remember not a little meanwhile the particular prolonged silent look with which the Prince had met her allusion to these primary efforts at escape. She was inwardly to dwell on the element of the unuttered that her tone had caused to play up into his irresistible eyes; and this because she considered with pride and joy that she had on the spot disposed of the doubt, the question, the challenge, or whatever else might have been, that such a look could convey. He had been sufficiently off his guard to show some little wonder as to their having plotted so very hard against their destiny, and she knew well enough of course what in this connexion was at the bottom of his thought, and what would have sounded out more or less if he hadn't happily saved himself

from words. All men were brutes enough to catch when they might at such chances for dissent—for all the good it really did them ; but the Prince's distinction was in being one of the few who could check himself before acting on the impulse. This, obviously, was what counted in a man as delicacy. If her friend had blurted or bungled he would have said, in his simplicity, " Did we do ' everything to avoid ' it when we faced your remarkable marriage ? "—quite handsomely of course using the plural, taking his share of the case, by way of a tribute of memory to the telegram she had received from him in Paris after Mr. Verver had despatched to Rome the news of their engagement. That telegram, that acceptance of the prospect proposed to them—an acceptance quite other than perfunctory—she had never destroyed ; though reserved for no eyes but her own it was still carefully reserved. She kept it in a safe place—from which, very privately, she sometimes took it out to read it over. *" A la guerre comme à la guerre then "*—it had been couched in the French tongue. *"We must lead our lives as we see them ; but I am charmed with your courage and almost surprised at my own."* The message had remained ambiguous ; she had read it in more lights than one ; it might mean that even without her his career was up-hill work for him, a daily fighting-matter on behalf of a good appearance, and that thus if they were to become neighbours again the event would compel him to live still more under arms. It might mean on the other hand that he found he was happy enough, and that accordingly, so far as she might imagine herself a danger, she was to think of him as prepared in advance, as really seasoned and secure. On his arrival in Paris with his wife, none the less, she had asked for no explanation, just as he himself hadn't asked if the document were still in her possession. Such an inquiry, everything

implied, was beneath him—just as it was beneath herself to mention to him uninvited that she had instantly and in perfect honesty offered to show the telegram to Mr. Verver, and that if this companion had but said the word she would immediately have put it before him. She had thereby forborne to call his attention to her consciousness that such an exposure would in all probability at once have dished her marriage; that all her future had in fact for the moment hung by the single hair of Mr. Verver's delicacy (as she supposed they must call it); and that her position in the matter of responsibility was therefore inattackably straight.

For the Prince himself, meanwhile, time, in its measured allowance, had originally much helped him —helped him in the sense of there not being enough of it to trip him up; in spite of which it was just this accessory element that seemed at present, with wonders of patience, to lie in wait. Time had begotten at first, more than anything else, separations, delays and intervals; but it was troublesomely less of an aid from the moment it began so to abound that he had to meet the question of what to do with it. Less of it was required for the state of being married than he had on the whole expected; less, strangely, for the state of being married even as he was married. And there was a logic in the matter, he knew; a logic that but gave this truth a sort of solidity of evidence. Mr. Verver, decidedly, helped him with it—with his wedded condition; helped him really so much that it made all the difference. In the degree in which he rendered it the service on Mr. Verver's part was remarkable—as indeed what service, from the first of their meeting, hadn't been? He was living, he had been living these four or five years, on Mr. Verver's services: a truth scarcely less plain if he dealt with them, for appreciation, one by one than if he poured

them all together into the general pot of his gratitude and let the thing simmer to a nourishing broth. To the latter way with them he was undoubtedly most disposed ; yet he would even thus now and again pick out a piece to taste on its own merits. Wondrous at such hours could seem the savour of the particular " treat," at his father-in-law's expense, that he more and more struck himself as enjoying. He had needed months and months to arrive at a full appreciation—he couldn't originally have given off-hand a name to his deepest obligation ; but by the time the name had flowered in his mind he was practically living at the ease guaranteed him. Mr. Verver then in a word took care of his relation to Maggie as he took care, and apparently always would, of everything else. He relieved him of all anxiety about his married life in the same manner in which he relieved him on the score of his bank-account. And as he performed the latter office by communicating with the bankers, so the former sprang as directly from his good understanding with his daughter. This understanding had, wonderfully—*that* was in high evidence—the same deep intimacy as the commercial, the financial association founded, far down, on a community of interest. And the correspondence, for the Prince, carried itself out in identities of character the vision of which fortunately rather tended to amuse than to—as might have happened—irritate him. Those people—and his free synthesis lumped together capitalists and bankers, retired men of business, illustrious collectors, American fathers-in-law, American fathers, little American daughters, little American wives—those people were of the same large lucky group, as one might say ; they were all at least of the same general species and had the same general instincts ; they hung together, they passed each other the word, they spoke each other's language, they did each other

" turns." In this last connexion it of course came up for our young man at a given moment that Maggie's relation with *him* was also on the perceived basis taken care of. Which was in fact the real upshot of the matter. It was a " funny " situation—that is it was funny just as it stood. Their married life was in question, but the solution wasn't less strikingly before them. It was all right for himself because Mr. Verver worked it so for Maggie's comfort, and it was all right for Maggie because he worked it so for her husband's.

The fact that time however wasn't, as we have said, wholly on the Prince's side might have shown for particularly true one dark day on which, by an odd but not unprecedented chance, the reflexions just noted offered themselves as his main recreation. They alone, it appeared, had been appointed to fill the hours for him, and even to fill the great square house in Portland Place, where the scale of one of the smaller saloons fitted them but loosely. He had looked into this room on the chance that he might find the Princess at tea ; but though the fireside service of the repast was shiningly present the mistress of the table was not, and he had waited for her, if waiting it could be called, while he measured again and again the stretch of polished floor. He could have named to himself no pressing reason for seeing her at this moment, and her not coming in, as the half-hour elapsed, became in fact quite positively, however perversely, the circumstance that kept him on the spot. Just there, he might have been feeling, just there he could best take his note. This observation was certainly by itself meagre amusement for a dreary little crisis ; but his walk to and fro, and in particular his repeated pause at one of the high front windows, gave each of the ebbing minutes, none the less, after a time, a little more of the quality of a

quickened throb of the spirit. These throbs scarce expressed however the impatience of desire, any more than they stood for sharp disappointment : the series together resembled perhaps more than anything else those fine waves of clearness through which, for a watcher of the east, dawn at last trembles into rosy day. The illumination indeed was all for the mind, the prospect revealed by it a mere immensity of the world of thought ; the material outlook was meantime a different matter. The March afternoon, judged at the window, had blundered back into autumn ; it had been raining for hours, and the colour of the rain, the colour of the air, of the mud, of the opposite houses, of life altogether, in so grim a joke, so idiotic a masquerade, was an unutterable dirty brown. There was at first even for the young man no faint flush in the fact of the direction taken, while he happened to look out, by a slow-jogging four-wheeled cab which, awkwardly deflecting from the middle course, at the apparent instance of a person within, began to make for the left-hand pavement and so at last, under further instructions, floundered to a full stop before the Prince's windows. The person within, alighting with an easier motion, proved to be a lady who left the vehicle to wait and, putting up no umbrella, quickly crossed the wet interval that separated her from the house. She but flitted and disappeared ; yet the Prince, from his standpoint, had had time to recognise her, and the recognition kept him for some minutes motionless.

Charlotte Stant, at such an hour, in a shabby four-wheeler and a waterproof, Charlotte Stant turning up for him at the very climax of his special inner vision, was an apparition charged with a congruity at which he stared almost as if it had been a violence. The effect of her coming to see him, him only, had, as he stood waiting, a singular intensity—though after

some minutes had passed the certainty of this began to drop. Perhaps she had *not* come, or had come only for Maggie; perhaps, on learning below that the Princess hadn't returned, she was merely leaving a message, writing a word on a card. He should see at any rate, and just yet, controlling himself, would do nothing. This thought of not interfering took on a sudden force for him; she would doubtless hear he was at home, but he would let her visit to him be all of her own choosing. And his view of a reason for leaving her free was the more remarkable that, though taking no step, he yet intensely hoped. The harmony of her breaking into sight while the superficial conditions were so against her was a harmony with conditions that were far from superficial and that gave, for his imagination, an extraordinary value to her presence. The value deepened strangely moreover with the rigour of his own attitude—with the fact too that, listening hard, he neither heard the house-door close again nor saw her go back to her cab; and it had risen to a climax by the time he had become aware, with his quickened sense, that she had followed the butler up to the landing from which his room opened. If anything could further then have added to it the renewed pause outside, as if she had said to the man "Wait a moment!" would have constituted this touch. Yet when the man had shown her in, had advanced to the tea-table to light the lamp under the kettle and had then busied himself all deliberately with the fire, she made it easy for her host to drop straight from any height of tension and to meet her provisionally on the question of Maggie. While the butler remained it was Maggie that she had come to see and Maggie that—in spite of this attendant's high blankness on the subject of all possibilities on that lady's part—she would cheerfully, by the fire, wait for. Directly they were alone together, however,

she mounted, with the whizz and the red light of a rocket, from the form to the fact, saying straight out as she stood and looked at him : " What else, my dear, what in the world else can we do ? "

It was as if he then knew on the spot why he had been feeling for hours in such fashion—as if he in fact knew within the minute things he hadn't known even while she was panting, from the effect of the staircase, at the door of the room. He knew at the same time, none the less, that *she* knew still more than he—in the sense, that is, of all the signs and portents that might count for them ; and his vision of alternatives (he could scarce say what to call them, solutions, satisfactions) opened out altogether with this tangible truth of her attitude by the chimney-place, the way she looked at him as through the gained advantage of it ; her right hand resting on the marble and her left keeping her skirt from the fire while she held out a foot to dry. He couldn't have told what particular links and gaps had at the end of a few minutes found themselves renewed and bridged ; for he remembered no occasion in Rome from which the picture could have been so exactly copied. He remembered, that is, none of her coming to see him in the rain while a muddy four-wheeler waited and while, though having left her waterproof downstairs, she was yet invested with the odd eloquence—the positive picturesqueness, yes, given all the rest of the matter—of a dull dress and a black Bowdlerised hat that seemed to make a point of insisting on their time of life and their moral intention, the hat's and the frock's own, as well as on the irony of indifference to them practically playing in her so handsome rain-freshened face. The sense of the past revived for him nevertheless as it hadn't yet done : it made that other time somehow meet the future close, interlocking with it, before his watching eyes, as in a long embrace of arms and lips, and so

handling and hustling the present that this poor quantity scarce retained substance enough, scarce remained sufficiently *there*, to be wounded or shocked.

What had happened in short was that Charlotte and he had by a single turn of the wrist of fate—"led up" to indeed, no doubt, by steps and stages that conscious computation had missed—been placed face to face in a freedom that extraordinarily partook of ideal perfection, since the magic web had spun itself without their toil, almost without their touch. Above all, on this occasion, once more, there sounded through their safety, as an undertone, the very voice he had listened to on the eve of his marriage with such another sort of unrest. Dimly, again and again, from that period on, he had seemed to hear it tell him why it kept recurring; but it phrased the large music now in a way that filled the room. The reason was—into which he had lived quite intimately by the end of a quarter of an hour—that just this truth of their safety offered it now a kind of unexampled receptacle, letting it spread and spread, but at the same time elastically enclosing it, banking it in, for softness, as with billows of eiderdown. On that morning in the Park there had been, however dissimulated, doubt and danger, whereas the tale this afternoon was taken up with a highly emphasised confidence. The emphasis, for their general comfort, was what Charlotte had come to apply; inasmuch as, though it was not what she definitely began with, it had soon irrepressibly shaped itself. It was the meaning of the question she had put to him as soon as they were alone—even though indeed, as from not quite understanding, he had not then directly replied; it was the meaning of everything else, down to the conscious quaintness of her rickety "growler" and the conscious humility of her toneless dress. It had helped him a little, the question of these eccentricities, to let her immediate appeal

pass without an answer. He could ask her instead what had become of her carriage and why above all she wasn't using it in such weather.

"It's just because of the weather," she explained. "It's my little idea. It makes me feel as I used to—when I could do as I liked."

V

This came out so straight that he saw at once how much truth it expressed ; yet it was truth that still a little puzzled him. " But did you ever like knocking about in such discomfort ? "

" It seems to me now that I then liked everything. It's the charm, at any rate," she said from her place at the fire, " of trying again the old feelings. They come back—they come back. Everything," she went on, " comes back. Besides," she wound up, " you know for yourself."

He stood near her, his hands in his pockets ; but not looking at her, looking hard at the tea-table. " Ah I haven't your courage. Moreover," he laughed, " it seems to me that so far as that goes I do live in hansoms. But you must awfully want your tea," he quickly added ; " so let me give you a good stiff cup."

He busied himself with this care, and she sat down, on his pushing up a low seat, where she had been standing ; so that while she talked he could bring her what she further desired. He moved to and fro before her, he helped himself ; and her visit, as the moments passed, had more and more the effect of a signal communication that she had come, all responsibly and deliberately, as on the clear show of the clock-face of their situation, to make. The whole demonstration, none the less, presented itself as taking

place at a very high level of debate—in the cool upper air of the finer discrimination, the deeper sincerity, the larger philosophy. No matter what were the facts invoked and arrayed, it was only a question as yet of their seeing their way together: to which indeed exactly the present occasion appeared to have so much to contribute. "It's not that you haven't my courage," Charlotte said, "but that you haven't, I rather think, my imagination. Unless indeed it should turn out after all," she added, "that you haven't even my intelligence. However, I shan't be afraid of that till you've given me more proof." And she made again, but more clearly, her point of a moment before. "You knew besides, you knew to-day I'd come. And if you knew that you know everything." So she pursued, and if he didn't meanwhile, if he didn't even at this, take her up, it might be that she was so positively fitting him again with the fair face of temporising kindness that he had given her, to keep her eyes on, at the other important juncture, and the sense of which she might ever since have been carrying about with her like a precious medal—not exactly blessed by the Pope—suspended round her neck. She had come back, however this might be, to her immediate account of herself, and no mention of their great previous passage was to rise to the lips of either. "Above all," she said, "there has been the personal romance of it."

"Of tea with me over the fire? Ah so far as that goes I don't think even my intelligence fails me."

"Oh it's further than that goes; and if I've had a better day than you it's perhaps, when I come to think of it, that I *am* braver. You bore yourself, you see. But I don't. I don't, I don't," she repeated.

"It's precisely boring one's self without relief," he protested, "that takes courage."

"Passive then—not active. My romance is that, if you want to know, I've been all day on the town.

Literally on the town—isn't that what they call it? I know how it feels." After which, as if breaking off, "And you, have you never been out?" she asked.

He still stood there with his hands in his pockets. "What should I have gone out for?"

"Oh what should people in our case do anything for? But you're wonderful, all of *you*—you know how to live. We're clumsy brutes, we others, beside you—we must always be 'doing' something. However," Charlotte pursued, "if you had gone out you might have missed the chance of me—which I'm sure, though you won't confess it, was what you didn't want; and might have missed above all the satisfaction that, look blank about it as you will, I've come to congratulate you on. That's really what I can at last do. You can't *not* know at least, on such a day as this—you can't not know," she said, "where you are." She waited as for him either to grant he knew or pretend he didn't; but he only drew a long deep breath which came out like a moan of impatience. It brushed aside the question of where he was or what he knew; it seemed to keep the ground clear for the question of his visitor herself, that of Charlotte Verver exactly as she sat there. So for some moments, with their long look, they but treated the matter in silence; with the effect indeed, by the end of the time, of having considerably brought it on. This was sufficiently marked in what Charlotte next said. "There it all is—extraordinary beyond words. It makes such a relation for us as, I verily believe, was never before in the world thrust upon two well-meaning creatures. Haven't we therefore to take things as we find them?" She put the question still more directly than that of a moment before, but to this one as well he returned no immediate answer. Noticing only that she had finished her tea he relieved her of her cup, carried it back to the table, asked her what more she would

have ; and then, on her " Nothing, thanks," returned to the fire and restored a displaced log to position by a small but almost too effectual kick. She had meanwhile got up again, and it was on her feet that she repeated the words she had first frankly spoken. " What else can we do, what in all the world else ? "

He took them up however no more than at first. " Where then have you been ? " he asked as from mere interest in her adventure.

" Everywhere I could think of—except to see people. I didn't want people—I wanted too much to think. But I've been back at intervals—three times ; and then come away again. My cabman must think me crazy—it's very amusing ; I shall owe him, when we come to settle, more money than he has ever seen. I've been, my dear," she went on, " to the British Museum—which you know I always adore. And I've been to the National Gallery and to a dozen old booksellers', coming across treasures, and I've lunched, on some strange nastiness, at a cookshop in Holborn. I wanted to go to the Tower, but it was too far—my old man urged that ; and I'd have gone to the Zoo if it hadn't been too wet—which he also begged me to observe. But you wouldn't believe—I did put in Saint Paul's. Such days," she wound up, " are expensive ; for, besides the cab, I've bought quantities of books." She immediately passed at any rate to another point. " I can't help wondering when you must last have laid eyes on them." And then as it had apparently for her companion an effect of abruptness : " Maggie, I mean, and the child. For I suppose you know he's with her."

" Oh yes, I know he's with her. I saw them this morning."

" And did they then announce their programme ? "

" She told me she was taking him, as usual, *da nonno.*"

"And for the whole day?"

He hesitated, but it was as if his attitude had slowly shifted. "She didn't say. And I didn't ask."

"Well," she went on, "it can't have been later than half-past ten—I mean when you saw them. They had got to Eaton Square before eleven. You know we don't formally breakfast, Adam and I; we have tea in our rooms—at least I have; but luncheon's early, and I saw my husband this morning by twelve; he was showing the child a picture-book. Maggie had been there with them, had left them settled together. Then she had gone out—taking the carriage for something he had been intending, but that she offered to do instead."

The Prince appeared to confess, at this, to his interest. "Taking, you mean, *your* carriage?"

"I don't know which, and it doesn't matter. It's not a question," she smiled, "of a carriage the more or the less. It's not a question even, if you come to that, of a cab. It's so beautiful," she said, "that it's not a question of anything vulgar or horrid." Which she gave him time to agree about; and though he was silent it was rather remarkably as if he fell in. "I went out—I wanted to. I had my idea. It seemed to me important. It has *been*—it *is* important. I know as I haven't known before the way they feel. I couldn't in any other way have made so sure of it."

"They feel a confidence," the Prince observed.

He had indeed said it for her. "They feel a confidence." And she proceeded with lucidity to the fuller illustration of it; speaking again of the three different moments that, in the course of her wild ramble, had witnessed her return—for curiosity and even really a little from anxiety—to Eaton Square. She was possessed of a latch-key rarely used: it had always irritated Adam—one of the few things that did

—to find servants standing up so inhumanly straight when they came home in the small hours after parties. "So I had but to slip in each time with my cab at the door and make out for myself, without their knowing it, that Maggie was still there. I came, I went—without their so much as dreaming. What do they really suppose," she asked, "becomes of one?—not so much sentimentally or morally, so to call it, and since that doesn't matter; but even just physically, materially, as a mere wandering woman: as a decent harmless wife, after all; as the best stepmother, after all, that really ever was; or at the least simply as a *maîtresse de maison* not quite without a conscience. They must even in their odd way," she declared, "have *some* idea."

"Oh they've a great deal of idea," said the Prince. And nothing was easier than to mention the quantity. "They think so much of us. They think in particular so much of you."

"Ah don't put it all on 'me'!" she smiled.

But he was putting it now where she had admirably prepared the place. "It's a matter of your known character."

"Ah thank you for 'known'!" she still smiled.

"It's a matter of your wonderful cleverness and wonderful charm. It's a matter of what those things have done for you in the world—I mean in *this* world and this place. You're a Personage for them—and Personages do go and come."

"Oh no, my dear; there you're quite wrong." And she laughed now in the happier light they had diffused. "That's exactly what Personages don't do: they live in state and under constant consideration; they haven't latch-keys, but drums and trumpets announce them; and when they go out in 'growlers' it makes a greater noise still. It's you, caro mio," she said, "who, so far as that goes, are the Personage."

"Ah," he in turn protested, "don't put it all on me! What, at any rate, when you get home," he added, "shall you say that you've been doing?"

"I shall say, beautifully, that I've been here."

"All day?"

"Yes—all day. Keeping you company in your solitude. How can we understand anything," she went on, "without really seeing that this is what they must like to think I do for you?—just as, quite as comfortably, you do it for me. The thing is for us to learn to take them as they are."

He considered this a while, in his restless way, but with his eyes not turning from her; after which, rather disconnectedly, though very vehemently, he brought out: "How can I not feel more than anything else how they adore together my boy?" And then, further, as if, slightly disconcerted, she had nothing to meet this and he quickly perceived the effect: "They'd have done the same for one of yours."

"Ah if I could have had one——! I hoped and I believed," said Charlotte, "that that would happen. It would have been better. It would have made perhaps some difference. He thought so too, poor duck—that it might have been. I'm sure he hoped and intended so. It's not, at any rate," she went on, "my fault. There it is." She had uttered these statements, one by one, gravely, sadly and responsibly, owing it to her friend to be clear. She paused briefly, but, as if once for all, she made her clearness complete. "And now I'm too sure. It will never be."

He waited for a moment. "Never?"

"Never." They treated the matter not exactly with solemnity, but with a certain decency, even perhaps urgency, of distinctness. "It would probably have been better," Charlotte added. "But

things turn out——! And it leaves us"—she made the point—"more alone."

He seemed to wonder. "It leaves *you* more alone."

"Oh," she again returned, "don't put it all on me! Maggie would have given herself to his child, I'm sure, scarcely less than he gives himself to yours. It would have taken more than any child of mine," she explained—"it would have taken more than ten children of mine, could I have had them—to keep our *sposi* apart." She smiled as for the breadth of the image, but as he seemed to take it in spite of this for important she then spoke gravely enough. "It's as strange as you like, but we're immensely alone." He kept vaguely moving, but there were moments when again, with an awkward ease and his hands in his pockets, he was more directly before her. He stood there at these last words, which had the effect of making him for a little throw back his head and, as thinking something out, stare up at the ceiling. "What will you say," she meanwhile asked, "that you've been doing?" This brought his consciousness and his eyes back to her, and she pointed her question. "I mean when she comes in—for I suppose she *will*, some time, come in. It seems to me we must say the same thing."

Well, he thought again. "Yet I can scarce pretend to have had what I haven't."

"Ah *what* haven't you had?—what aren't you having?"

Her question rang out as they lingered face to face, and he still took it, before he answered, from her eyes. "We must at least then, not to be absurd together, do the same thing. We must act, it would really seem, in concert."

"It would really seem!" Her eyebrows, her shoulders went up, quite in gaiety, as for the relief

this brought her. "It's all in the world I pretend. We must act in concert. Heaven knows," she said, "*they* do!"

So it was that he evidently saw and that, by his admission, the case could fairly be put. But what he evidently saw appeared to come over him, at the same time, as too much for him, so that he fell back suddenly to ground where she wasn't awaiting him. "The difficulty is, and will always be, that I don't understand them. I didn't at first, but I thought I should learn to. That was what I hoped, and it appeared then that Fanny Assingham might help me."

"Oh Fanny Assingham!" said Charlotte Verver.

He stared a moment at her tone. "She would do anything for us."

To which Charlotte at first said nothing—as if from the sense of too much. Then, indulgently enough, she shook her head. "We're beyond her."

He thought a moment—as of where this placed them. "She'd do anything then for *them*."

"Well, so would we—so that doesn't help us. She has broken down. She doesn't understand us. And really, my dear," Charlotte added, "Fanny Assingham doesn't matter."

He wondered again. "Unless as taking care of *them*."

"Ah," Charlotte instantly said, "isn't it for us, only, to do that?" She spoke as with a flare of pride for their privilege and their duty. "I think we want no one's aid."

She spoke indeed with a nobleness not the less effective for coming in so oddly; with a sincerity visible even through the complicated twist by which any effort to protect the father and the daughter seemed necessarily conditioned for them. It moved him, in any case, as if some spring of his own, a weaker one, had suddenly been broken by it. These things,

all the while, the privilege, the duty, the opportunity, had been the substance of his own vision ; they formed the note he had been keeping back to show her that he wasn't, in their so special situation, without a responsible view. A conception he could name and could act on was something that now at last, not to be too eminent a fool, he was required by all the graces to produce, and the luminous idea she had herself uttered would have been his expression of it. She had anticipated him, but since her expression left, for positive beauty, nothing to be desired, he felt rather righted than wronged. A large response, as he looked at her, came into his face, a light of excited perception, all his own, in the glory of which—as it almost might be called—what he gave her back had the value of what she had given him. " They're extraordinarily happy."

Oh Charlotte's measure of it was only too full. " Beatifically."

" That's the great thing," he went on ; " so that it doesn't matter, really, that one doesn't understand. Besides, you do—enough."

" I understand my husband perhaps," she after an instant conceded. " I don't understand your wife."

" You're of the same race, at any rate—more or less ; of the same general tradition and education, of the same moral paste. There are things you have in common with them. But I, on my side, as I've gone on trying to see if I haven't some of these things too—I, on my side, have more and more failed. There seem at last to be none worth mentioning. I can't help seeing it—I'm decidedly too different."

" Yet you're not "—Charlotte made the important point—" too different from *me*."

" I don't know—as we're not married. That brings things out. Perhaps if we were," he said, " you *would* find some abyss of divergence."

"Since it depends on that then," she smiled, "I'm safe—as you are anyhow. Moreover, as one has so often had occasion to feel, and even to remark, they're very, very simple. That makes," she added, "a difficulty for belief; but when once one has taken it in it makes less difficulty for action. I *have* at last, for myself, I think, taken it in. I'm not afraid."

He wondered a moment. "Not afraid of what?"

"Well, generally, of some beastly mistake. Especially of any mistake founded on one's idea of their difference. For that idea," Charlotte developed, "positively makes one so tender."

"Ah but rather!"

"Well then there it is. I can't put myself into Maggie's skin—I can't, as I say. It's not my fit—I shouldn't be able, as I see it, to breathe in it. But I can feel that I'd do anything to shield it from a bruise. Tender as I am for her too," she went on, "I think I'm still more so for my husband. *He's* in truth of a sweet simplicity——!"

The Prince turned over a while the sweet simplicity of Mr. Verver. "Well, I don't know that I can choose. At night all cats are grey. I only see how, for so many reasons, we ought to stand toward them—and how, to do ourselves justice, we do. It represents for us a conscious care——"

"Of every hour, literally," said Charlotte. She could rise to the highest measure of the facts. "And for which we must trust each other——!"

"Oh as we trust the saints in glory. Fortunately," the Prince hastened to add, "we can." With which, as for the full assurance and the pledge it involved, each hand instinctively found the other. "It's all too wonderful."

Firmly and gravely she kept his hand. "It's too beautiful."

And so for a minute they stood together as strongly

held and as closely confronted as any hour of their easier past even had seen them. They were silent at first, only facing and faced, only grasping and grasped, only meeting and met. "It's sacred," he said at last.

"It's sacred," she breathed back to him. They vowed it, gave it out and took it in, drawn, by their intensity, more closely together. Then of a sudden, through this tightened circle, as at the issue of a narrow strait into the sea beyond, everything broke up, broke down, gave way, melted and mingled. Their lips sought their lips, their pressure their response and their response their pressure; with a violence that had sighed itself the next moment to the longest and deepest of stillnesses they passionately sealed their pledge.

VI

He had taken it from her, as we have seen moreover, that Fanny Assingham didn't now matter—the "now" he had even himself supplied, as no more than fair to his sense of various earlier stages; and, though his assent remained scarce more than tacit, his behaviour, for the hour, so fell into line that for many days he kept postponing the visit he had promised his old friend on the occasion of their talk at the Foreign Office. With regret, none the less, would he have seen it quite extinguished, that theory of their relation as attached pupil and kind instructress in which they had from the first almost equally found a convenience. It had been he, no doubt, who had most put it forward, since his need of knowledge fairly exceeded her mild pretension; but he had again and again repeated to her that he should never, without her, have been where he was, and she hadn't successfully concealed the pleasure it might give her to believe it, even after the question of where he was had begun to show itself as rather more closed than open to interpretation. It had never indeed, before that evening, come up as during the passage at the official party, and he had for the first time at those moments, a little disappointedly, got the impression of a certain failure, on the dear woman's part, of something he was aware of having always rather freely taken for granted in her. Of what exactly the failure consisted he would still perhaps

have felt it a little harsh to try to say ; and if she had in fact, as by Charlotte's observation, " broken down," the details of the collapse would be comparatively unimportant. They came to the same thing, all such collapses—the failure of courage, the failure of friendship, or the failure just simply of tact ; for didn't any one of them by itself amount really to the failure of wit ? —which was the last thing he had expected of her and which would be but another name for the triumph of stupidity. It had been Charlotte's remark that they were at last " beyond " her ; whereas he had ever enjoyed believing that a certain easy imagination in her would keep up with him to the end. He shrank from affixing a label to Mrs. Assingham's want of faith ; but when he thought at his ease of the way persons who were capable *really* entertained—or at least with any refinement—the passion of personal loyalty, he figured for them a play of fancy neither timorous nor scrupulous. So would his personal loyalty, if need be, have accepted the adventure for the good creature herself ; to that definite degree that he had positively almost missed the luxury of some such call from her. That was what it all came back to again with these people among whom he had married—that one found one used one's imagination mainly for wondering how they contrived so little to appeal to it. He felt at moments as if there were never anything to do for them that was worthy—to call worthy—of the personal relation ; never any charming charge to take of any confidence deeply reposed. He might vulgarly have put it that one had never to plot or to lie for them ; he might humorously have put it that one had never, as by the higher conformity, to lie in wait with the dagger or to prepare insidiously the cup. These were the services that by all romantic tradition were consecrated to affection quite as much as to hate. But he could amuse himself with saying—so far as the

amusement went—that they were what he had once for all turned his back on.

Fanny was meanwhile frequent, it appeared, in Eaton Square ; so much he gathered from the visitor who was not infrequent, least of all at tea-time, during the same period, in Portland Place ; though they had little need to talk of her after practically agreeing that they had outlived her. To the scene of these conversations and suppressions Mrs. Assingham herself made, actually, no approach ; her latest view of her utility seeming to be that it had found in Eaton Square its most urgent field. It was finding there in fact every thing and every one but the Prince, who mostly, just now, kept away, or who at all events, on the interspaced occasions of his calling, happened not to encounter the only person from whom he was a little estranged. It would have been all prodigious if he hadn't already, with Charlotte's aid, so very considerably lived into it—it would have been all indescribably remarkable, this fact that, with wonderful causes for it so operating on the surface, nobody else, as yet, in the combination, seemed estranged from anybody. If Mrs. Assingham delighted in Maggie she knew by this time how most easily to reach her, and if she was unhappy about Charlotte she knew by the same reasoning how most probably to miss that vision of her on which affliction would feed. It might feed of course on finding her so absent from her home—just as this particular phenomenon of her domestic detachment could be, by the anxious mind, best studied there. Fanny was, however, for her reasons, " shy " of Portland Place itself—this was appreciable ; so that she might well, after all, have no great light on the question of whether Charlotte's appearances there were frequent or not, any more than on that of the account they might be keeping of the usual solitude (since it came to this) of the head

of that house. There was always, to cover all ambiguities, to constitute a fund of explanation for the divisions of Mrs. Verver's day, the circumstance that, at the point they had all reached together, Mrs. Verver was definitely and by general acclamation in charge of the "social relations" of the family, literally of those of the two households; as to her genius for representing which in the great world and in the grand style vivid evidence had more and more accumulated. It had been established in the two households at an early stage and with the highest good humour that Charlotte was a, was *the*, "social success," whereas the Princess, though kind, though punctilious, though charming, though in fact the dearest little creature in the world *and* the Princess into the bargain, was distinctly not, would distinctly never be, and might as well give it up altogether; whether through being above it or below it, too much outside of it or too much lost in it, too unequipped or too indisposed, didn't especially matter. What sufficed was that the whole thing, call it appetite or call it patience, the act of representation at large and the daily business of intercourse, fell in with Charlotte's tested facility and, not much less visibly, with her accommodating, her generous view of her domestic use. She had come, frankly, into the connexion, to do and to be what she could, "no questions asked," and she had taken over accordingly as it stood, and in the finest practical spirit, the burden of a visiting-list that Maggie, originally, left to herself, and left even more to the Principino, had suffered to get inordinately out of hand.

She had in a word not only mounted cheerfully the London treadmill — she had handsomely professed herself, for the further comfort of the three others, sustained in the effort by a "frivolous side," if that were not too harsh a name for a pleasant

constitutional curiosity. There were possibilities of dulness, ponderosities of practice, arid social sands, the bad quarters of an hour that turned up like false pieces in a debased currency, of which she made, on principle, very nearly as light as if she hadn't been clever enough to distinguish. The Prince had, on this score, paid her his compliment soon after her return from her wedding-tour in America, where, by all accounts, she had wondrously borne the brunt; facing brightly, at her husband's side, everything that came up—and what had come, often, was beyond words: just as, precisely, with her own interest only at stake, she had thrown up the game during the visit paid before her marriage. The discussion of the American world, the comparison of notes, impressions and adventures, had been all at hand, as a ground of meeting for Mrs. Verver and her husband's son-in-law, from the hour of the reunion of the two couples. Thus it had been in short that Charlotte could, for her friend's appreciation, so promptly make her point; even using expressions from which he let her see, at the hour, that he drew amusement of his own. "What could be more simple than one's going through with everything," she had asked, "when it's so plain a part of one's contract? I've got so much, by my marriage"—for she had never for a moment concealed from him how "much" she had felt it and was finding it—"that I should deserve no charity if I stinted my return. Not to do that, to give back on the contrary all one can, are just one's decency and one's honour and one's virtue. These things, henceforth, if you're interested to know, are my rule of life, the absolute little gods of my worship, the holy images set up on the wall. Oh yes, since I'm not a brute," she had wound up, "you shall see me as I *am*!" Which was therefore as he had seen her—dealing always, from month to month, from day to day and from one

occasion to the other, with the duties of a remunerated office. Her perfect, her brilliant efficiency had doubtless all the while contributed immensely to the pleasant ease in which her husband and her husband's daughter were lapped. It had in fact probably done something more than this—it had given them a finer and sweeter view of the possible scope of that ease. They had brought her in—on the crudest expression of it—to do the "worldly" for them, and she had done it with such genius that they had themselves in consequence renounced it even more than they had originally intended. In proportion as she did it moreover was she to be relieved of other and humbler doings; which minor matters, by the properest logic, devolved therefore upon Maggie, in whose chords and whose province they more naturally lay. Not less naturally, by the same token, they included the repair, at the hands of the latter young woman, of every stitch conceivably dropped by Charlotte in Eaton Square. This was homely work, but that was just what made it Maggie's. Bearing in mind dear Amerigo, who was so much of her own great mundane feather, and whom the homeliness in question didn't, no doubt, quite equally provide for—that would be, to balance, just in a manner Charlotte's very most charming function, from the moment Charlotte could be got adequately to recognise it.

Well, that Charlotte might be appraised as at last not ineffectually recognising it was a reflexion that, during the days with which we are actually engaged, completed in the Prince's breast these others, these images and ruminations of his leisure, these gropings and fittings of his conscience and his experience, that we have attempted to set in order there. They bore him company, not insufficiently — considering in especial his fuller resources in that line—while he worked out to the last lucidity the principle on which

he forbore either to follow up Fanny in Cadogan Place or to perpetrate the error of too marked an assiduity in Eaton Square. This error would be his not availing himself to the utmost of the convenience of any artless theory of his constitution, or of Charlotte's, that might prevail there. That artless theories could and did prevail was a fact he had ended by accepting, under copious evidence, as definite and ultimate ; and it consorted with common prudence, with the simplest economy of life, not to be wasteful of any odd gleaning. To haunt Eaton Square in fine would be to show that he hadn't, like his brilliant associate, a sufficiency of work in the world. It was just his having that sufficiency, it was just their having it together, that, so strangely and so blessedly, made, as they put it to each other, everything possible. What further propped up the case moreover was that the " world," by still another beautiful perversity of their chance, included Portland Place without including to anything like the same extent Eaton Square. The latter residence, at the same time, it must promptly be added, did on occasion wake up to opportunity and, as giving itself a frolic shake, send out a score of invitations—one of which fitful flights, precisely, had, before Easter, the effect of disturbing a little our young man's measure of his margin. Maggie, with a proper spirit, held that her father ought from time to time to give a really considered dinner, and Mr. Verver, who had as little idea as ever of not meeting expectation, was of the harmonious opinion that his wife ought. Charlotte's own judgement was always that they were ideally free—the proof of which would always be, she maintained, that every one they feared they might most have alienated by neglect would arrive, wreathed in smiles, on the merest hint of a belated signal. Wreathed in smiles, all round, truly enough, these apologetic

banquets struck Amerigo as being ; they were frankly touching occasions to him, marked, in the great London *bousculade*, with a small still grace of their own, an investing amenity and humanity. Everybody came, everybody rushed ; but all succumbed to the soft influence, and the brutality of mere multitude, of curiosity without tenderness, was put off, at the foot of the fine staircase, with the overcoats and shawls. The entertainment offered a few evenings before Easter, and at which Maggie and he were inevitably present as guests, was a discharge of obligations not insistently incurred, and had thus possibly all the more the note of this almost Arcadian optimism : a large bright dull murmurous mild-eyed middle-aged dinner, involving for the most part very bland, though very exalted, immensely announceable and hierarchically placeable couples, and followed, without the oppression of a later contingent, by a brief instrumental concert, over the preparation of which, the Prince knew, Maggie's anxiety had conferred with Charlotte's ingenuity and both had supremely revelled, as it were, in Mr. Verver's solvency.

The Assinghams were there, by prescription, though quite at the foot of the social ladder ; and with the Colonel's wife, in spite of her humility of position, the Prince was more inwardly occupied than with any other person except Charlotte. He was occupied with Charlotte because in the first place she looked so inordinately handsome and held so high, where so much else was mature and sedate, the torch of responsive youth and the standard of passive grace ; and because of the fact that, in the second, the occasion, so far as it referred itself with any confidence of emphasis to a hostess, seemed to refer itself preferentially, well-meaningly and perversely, to Maggie. It wasn't indistinguishable to him, when once they were all stationed, that his wife too had in perfection

her own little character ; but he wondered how it managed so visibly to simplify itself—and this, he knew, in spite of any desire she entertained—to the essential air of having overmuch on her mind the felicity, and indeed the very conduct and credit, of the feast. He knew as well the other things of which her appearance was at any time—and in Eaton Square especially—made up : her resemblance to her father, at times so vivid and coming out, in the delicate warmth of occasions, like the quickened fragrance of a flower ; her resemblance, as he had hit it off for her once in Rome, during the first flushed days after their engagement, to a little dancing-girl at rest, ever so light of movement but most often panting gently, even a shade compunctiously, on a bench ; her approximation, finally—for it was analogy somehow more than identity—to the transmitted images of rather neutral and negative propriety that made up, in his long line, the average of wifehood and motherhood. If the Roman matron had been, in sufficiency, first and last, the honour of that line, Maggie would no doubt, at fifty, have expanded, have solidified to some such dignity, even should she suggest a little but a Cornelia in miniature. A light however broke for him in season, and when once it had done so it made him more than ever aware of Mrs. Verver's vaguely yet quite exquisitely contingent participation—a mere hinted or tendered discretion ; in short of Mrs. Verver's indescribable unfathomable relation to the scene. Her placed condition, her natural seat and neighbourhood, her intenser presence, her quieter smile, her fewer jewels, were inevitably all as nothing compared with the preoccupation that burned in Maggie like a small flame and that had in fact kindled in each of her cheeks a little attesting, but fortunately by no means unbecoming, spot. The party was her father's party and its greater or smaller success was

a question having for her all the importance of *his* importance; so that sympathy created for her a visible suspense, under pressure of which she bristled with filial reference, with little filial recalls of expression, movement, tone. It was all unmistakable, and as pretty as possible, if one would, and even as funny; but it put the pair so together as undivided by the marriage of each that the Princess—*il n'y avait pas à dire*—might sit where she liked: she would still always in that house be irremediably Maggie Verver. The Prince found himself at this hour so beset with the perception we speak of that its natural complement for him would really have been to wonder if Mr. Verver had produced on people something of the same impression in the recorded cases of his having dined with his daughter.

This backward speculation, had it begun to play, however, would have been easily arrested; for it was at present to come over Amerigo as never before that his remarkable father-in-law was the man in the world least equipped with different appearances for different times. He was simple, he was a revelation of simplicity, and that was the end of him so far as he consisted of an appearance at all—a question that might verily, for a weakness in it, have been argued. It amused our young man, who was taking his pleasure to-night, it will be seen, in sundry occult ways, it amused him to feel how everything else the master of the house consisted of—resources, possessions, facilities and amiabilities amplified by the social legend—depended, for conveying the effect of quantity, on no personal "equation," no mere measurable medium. Quantity was in the air for these good people, and Mr. Verver's estimable quality was almost wholly in that pervasion. He was meagre and modest and clear-browed, and his eyes, if they wandered without fear, yet stayed without defiance; his shoulders were

not broad, his chest was not high, his complexion was not fresh and the crown of his head was not covered ; in spite of all of which he looked, at the top of his table, so nearly like a little boy shyly entertaining in virtue of some imposed rank, that he *could* only be one of the powers, the representative of a force—quite as an infant king is the representative of a dynasty. In this generalised view of his father-in-law, intensified to-night but always operative, Amerigo had now for some time taken refuge. The refuge, after the reunion of the two households in England, had more and more offered itself as the substitute for communities, from man to man, that, by his original calculation, might have become possible, but that had not really ripened and flowered. He met the decent family eyes across the table, met them afterwards in the music-room, but only to read in them still what he had learned to read during his first months, the time of over-anxious initiation, a kind of apprehension in which the terms and conditions were finally fixed and absolute. This directed regard rested at its ease, but it neither lingered nor penetrated, and was, to the Prince's fancy, much of the same order as any glance directed, for due attention, from the same quarter, to the figure of a cheque received in the course of business and about to be enclosed to a banker. It made sure of the amount—and just so, from time to time, the amount of the Prince was certified. He was being thus, in renewed instalments, perpetually paid in ; he already reposed in the bank as a value, but subject, in this comfortable way, to repeated, to infinite endorsement. The net result of all of which moreover was that the young man had no wish to see his value diminish. He himself decidedly hadn't fixed it—the " figure " was a conception all of Mr. Verver's own. Certainly however everything must be kept up to it ; never so

much as to-night had the Prince felt this. He would have been uncomfortable, as these quiet expressions passed, had the case not been guaranteed for him by the intensity of his accord with Charlotte. It was impossible that he shouldn't now and again meet Charlotte's eyes, as it was also visible that she now and again met her husband's. For her as well, in all his pulses, he felt the conveyed impression. It put them, it kept them together, through the vain show of their separation; made the two other faces, made the whole lapse of the evening, the people, the lights, the flowers, the pretended talk, the exquisite music, a mystic golden bridge between them, strongly swaying and sometimes almost vertiginous, for that intimacy of which the sovereign law would be the vigilance of "care," would be never rashly to forget and never consciously to wound.

VII

The main interest of these hours for us, however, will have been in the way the Prince continued to know, during a particular succession of others, separated from the evening in Eaton Square by a short interval, a certain persistent aftertaste. This was the lingering savour of a cup presented to him by Fanny Assingham's hand while, dinner done, the clustered quartette in the music-room kept their ranged companions moved if one would, but conveniently motionless. Mrs. Assingham contrived, after a couple of pieces, to convey to her friend that, for her part, she was moved—by the genius of Brahms—beyond what she could bear; so that, without apparent deliberation, she had presently floated away at the young man's side to such a distance as permitted them to converse without the effect of disdain. It was the twenty minutes enjoyed with her, during the rest of the concert, in the less associated electric glare of one of the empty rooms—it was their achieved and, as he would have said, successful, most pleasantly successful, talk on one of the sequestered sofas, it was this that was substantially to underlie his consciousness of the later occasion. The later occasion, then mere matter of discussion, had formed her ground for desiring—in a light undertone into which his quick ear read indeed some nervousness—these independent words with him: she had sounded, covertly but

distinctly, by the time they were seated together, the great question of what it might involve. It had come out for him before anything else, and so abruptly that this almost needed an explanation. Then the abruptness itself had appeared to explain—which had introduced in turn a slight awkwardness. "Do you know that they're not, after all, going to Matcham; so that if they don't—if at least Maggie doesn't—you won't, I suppose, go by yourself?" It was, as I say, at Matcham, where the event had placed him, it was at Matcham during the Easter days, that it most befell him, oddly enough, to live over inwardly, for its wealth of special significance, this passage by which the event had been really a good deal determined. He had paid first and last many an English country visit; he had learned even from of old to do the English things and to do them all sufficiently in the English way; if he didn't always enjoy them madly he enjoyed them at any rate as much, to all appearance, as the good people who had in the night of time unanimously invented them and who still, in the prolonged afternoon of their good faith, unanimously, even if a trifle automatically, practised them; yet with it all he had never so much as during such sojourns the trick of a certain detached, the amusement of a certain inward critical, life; the determined need, while apparently all participant, of returning upon himself, of backing noiselessly in, far in again, and rejoining there, as it were, that part of his mind that was not engaged at the front. His body, very constantly, was engaged at the front—in shooting, in riding, in golfing, in walking, over the fine diagonals of meadow-paths or round the pocketed corners of billiard-tables; it sufficiently, on the whole, in fact, bore the brunt of bridge-playing, of breakfasting, lunching, tea-drinking, dining, and of the nightly climax over the *bottigliera*, as he called it,

of the bristling tray ; it met, finally, to the extent of the limited tax on lip, on gesture, on wit, most of the current demands of conversation and expression. Therefore something of him, he often felt at these times, was left out ; it was much more when he was alone or when he was with his own people—or when he was, say, with Mrs. Verver and nobody else—that he moved, that he talked, that he listened, that he felt, as a congruous whole.

" English society," as he would have said, cut him accordingly in two, and he reminded himself often, in his relations with it, of a man possessed of a shining star, a decoration, an order of some sort, something so ornamental as to make his identity not complete, ideally, without it, yet who, finding no other such object generally worn, should be perpetually and the least bit ruefully unpinning it from his breast to transfer it to his pocket. The Prince's shining star may, no doubt, have been nothing more precious than his private subtlety ; but whatever the object he just now fingered it a good deal out of sight—amounting as it mainly did for him to a restless play of memory and a fine embroidery of thought. Something had rather momentously occurred, in Eaton Square, during his enjoyed minutes with his old friend : his present perspective made definitely clear to him that she had plumped out for him her first little lie. That took on (and he could have scarce said why) a sharpness of importance : she had never lied to him before—if only because it had never come up for her, properly, logically, morally, that she must. As soon as she had put to him the question of what he would do—by which she meant of what Charlotte would also do—in that event of Maggie's and Mr. Verver's not embracing the proposal they had appeared for a day or two resignedly to entertain ; as soon as she had betrayed her curiosity as to the line the other pair, so

left to themselves, might take, a desire to avoid the appearance of at all too directly prying had become marked in her. Betrayed by the solicitude of which she had already three weeks before given him a view, she had been obliged on a second thought to name intelligibly a reason for her appeal; while the Prince, on his side, had had, not without mercy, his glimpse of her momentarily groping for one and yet remaining unprovided. Not without mercy because, absolutely, he had on the spot, in his friendliness, invented one for her use, presenting it to her with a look no more significant than if he had picked up, to hand back to her, a dropped flower. "You ask if I'm likely also to back out then, because it may make a difference in what you and the Colonel decide?"—he had gone as far as that for her, fairly inviting her to assent, though not having had his impression, from any indication offered him by Charlotte, that the Assinghams were really in question for the large Matcham party. The wonderful thing after this was that the active couple had in the interval managed to inscribe themselves on the golden roll; an exertion of a sort that, to do her justice, he had never before observed Fanny to make. This last passage of the chapter but proved after all with what success she could work when she would.

Once launched, himself, at any rate, as he had been directed by all the terms of the intercourse between Portland Place and Eaton Square, once steeped at Matcham in the enjoyment of a splendid hospitality, he found everything, for his interpretation, for his convenience, fall easily enough into place; and all the more that Mrs. Verver was at hand to exchange ideas and impressions with. The great house was full of people, of possible new combinations, of the quickened play of possible propinquity, and of course no appearance was less to be cultivated than that of his having

sought an opportunity to forgather with his friend at a safe distance from their respective *sposi*. There was a happy boldness, at the best, in their mingling thus, each unaccompanied, in the same sustained sociability—just exactly a touch of that eccentricity of associated freedom which sat so lightly on the imagination of the relatives left behind. They were exposed as much as one would to its being pronounced funny that they should, at such a rate, go about together—though on the other hand this consideration drew relief from the fact that, in their high conditions and with the easy tradition, the almost inspiring allowances, of the house in question, no individual line, however freely marked, was pronounced anything more than funny. Both our friends felt afresh, as they had felt before, the convenience of a society so placed that it had only its own sensibility to consider —looking as it did well over the heads of all lower growths; and that moreover treated its own sensibility quite as the easiest, friendliest, most informal and domesticated party to the general alliance. What any one "thought" of any one else—above all of any one else *with* any one else—was a matter incurring in these halls so little awkward formulation that hovering Judgement, the spirit with the scales, might perfectly have been imaged there as some rather snubbed and subdued but quite trained and tactful poor relation, of equal, of the properest, lineage, only of aspect a little dingy, doubtless from too limited a change of dress, for whose tacit and abstemious presence, never betrayed by a rattle of her rusty machine, a room in the attic and a plate at the side table were decently usual. It was amusing, in such lightness of air, that the Prince should again present himself only to speak for the Princess, again so unfortunately unable to leave home; and that Mrs. Verver should as regularly figure as an embodied, a beautifully deprecating

apology for her husband, who was all geniality and humility among his own treasures, but as to whom the legend had grown up that he couldn't bear, with the height of his standards and the tone of the company, in the way of sofas and cabinets, habitually kept by him, the irritation and depression to which promiscuous visiting even at pompous houses had been found to expose him. That was all right, the noted working harmony of the clever son-in-law and the charming stepmother, so long as the relation was, for the effect in question, maintained at the proper point between sufficiency and excess.

What with the noble fairness of the place, meanwhile, the generous mood of the sunny gusty lusty English April, all panting and heaving with impatience or even at moments kicking and crying like some infant Hercules who wouldn't be dressed ; what with these things and the bravery of youth and beauty, the insolence of fortune and appetite so diffused among his fellow guests that the poor Assinghams, in their comparatively marked maturity and their comparatively small splendour, were the only approach to a false note in the concert, the stir of the air was such, for going, in a degree, to one's head, that, as a mere matter of exposure, almost grotesque in its flagrancy, his situation resembled some elaborate practical joke carried out at his expense. Every voice in the great bright house was a call to the ingenuities and impunities of pleasure ; every echo was a defiance of difficulty, doubt or danger ; every aspect of the picture, a glowing plea for the immediate, and as with plenty more to come, was another phase of the spell. For a world so constituted was governed by a spell, that of the smile of the gods and the favour of the powers ; the only handsome, the only gallant, in fact the only intelligent acceptance of which was a faith in its guarantees and a high spirit for its chances. Its

demand—to that the thing came back—was above all for courage and good humour ; and the value of this as a general assurance—that is for seeing one through at the worst—hadn't even in the easiest hours of his old Roman life struck the Prince so convincingly. His old Roman life had had more poetry, no doubt, but as he looked back upon it now it seemed to hang in the air of mere iridescent horizons, to have been loose and vague and thin, with large languorous unaccountable blanks. The present order, as it spread about him, had somehow the ground under its feet, and a trumpet in its ears, and a bottomless bag of solid shining British sovereigns—which was much to the point—in its hand. Courage and good humour therefore were the breath of the day ; though for ourselves at least it would have been also much to the point that with Amerigo really the innermost effect of all this perceptive ease was perhaps a strange final irritation. He compared the lucid result with the extraordinary substitute for perception that presided, in the bosom of his wife, at so contented a view of his conduct and course—a state of mind that was positively like a vicarious good conscience cultivated ingeniously on his behalf, a perversity of pressure innocently persisted in ; and this wonder of irony became on occasion too intense to be kept wholly to himself. It wasn't that at Matcham anything particular, anything monstrous, anything that had to be noticed, permitted itself, as they said, to "happen"; there were only odd moments when the breath of the day, as it has been called, struck him so full in the face that he broke out with all the hilarity of "What indeed would *they* have made of it?" "They" were of course Maggie and her father, moping—so far as they ever consented to mope—in monotonous Eaton Square, but placid too in the belief that they knew beautifully what their expert companions were

in for. They knew, it might have appeared in these lights, absolutely nothing on earth worth speaking of —whether beautifully or cynically; and they would perhaps sometimes be a little less trying if they would only once for all peacefully admit that knowledge wasn't one of their needs and that they were in fact constitutionally inaccessible to it. They were good children, bless their hearts, and the children of good children; so that verily the Principino himself, as less consistently of that descent, might figure to the fancy as the ripest genius of the trio.

The difficulty was, for the nerves of daily intercourse with Maggie in particular, that her imagination was clearly never ruffled by the sense of any anomaly. The great anomaly would have been that her husband, or even that her father's wife, should prove to have been made, for the long run, after the pattern set from so far back to the Ververs. If one *was* so made one had certainly no business on any terms at Matcham; whereas if one wasn't one had no business there on the particular terms—terms of conformity with the principles of Eaton Square—under which one had been so absurdly dedicated. Deep at the heart of that roused unrest in our young man which we have had to content ourselves with calling his irritation—deep in the bosom of this falsity of position glowed the red spark of his inextinguishable sense of a higher and braver propriety. There were situations that were ridiculous but that one couldn't yet help, as for instance when one's wife chose, in the most usual way, to make one so. Precisely here however was the difference; it had taken poor Maggie to invent a way so extremely unusual—yet to which none the less it would be too absurd that he should merely lend himself. Being thrust, systematically, with another woman, and a woman one happened, by the same token, exceedingly to like, and being so thrust that

the theory of it seemed to publish one as idiotic or incapable—this was a predicament of which the dignity depended all on one's own handling. What was supremely grotesque in fact was the essential opposition of theories—as if a galantuomo, as *he* at least constitutionally conceived galantuomini, could do anything *but* blush to "go about" at such a rate with such a person as Mrs. Verver in a state of child-like innocence, the state of our primitive parents before the Fall. The grotesque theory, as he would have called it, was perhaps an odd one to resent with violence, and he did it—also as a man of the world—all merciful justice; but none the less assuredly there was but one way *really* to mark, and for his companion as much as for himself, the commiseration in which they held it. Adequate comment on it could only be private, but it could also at least be active, and of rich and effectual comment Charlotte and he were fortunately alike capable. Wasn't this consensus literally their only way not to be ungracious? It was positively as if the measure of their escape from that danger were given by the growth between them, during their auspicious visit, of an exquisite sense of complicity.

VIII

He found himself therefore saying with gaiety even to Fanny Assingham, for their common concerned glance at Eaton Square, the glance that was so markedly never, as it might have been, a glance at Portland Place: "What *would* our *cari sposi* have made of it here? what would they, you know, really?"—which overflow would have been reckless if already, and surprisingly perhaps even to himself, he hadn't got used to thinking of this friend as a person in whom the element of protest had of late been unmistakably allayed. He exposed himself of course to her replying: "Ah if it would have been so bad for them how can it be so good for you?"—but, quite apart from the small sense the question would have had at the best, she appeared already to unite with him in confidence and cheer. He had as well his view—or at least a partial one—of the inner spring of this present comparative humility, which was all consistent with the retractation he had practically seen her make after Mr. Verver's last dinner. Without diplomatising to do so, with no effort to square her, none to bribe her to an attitude for which he would have had no use in her if it weren't sincere, he yet felt how he both held her and moved her by the felicity of his taking pity, all instinctively, on her just discernible depression. By just so much as he guessed that she felt herself, as the slang was, out of it, out of

the crystal current and the expensive picture, by just so much had his friendship charmingly made up to her from hour to hour for the penalties, as they might have been grossly called, of her mistake. Her mistake had only been, after all, in her wanting to seem to him straight ; she had let herself in for being—as she had made haste, for that matter, during the very first half-hour at tea to proclaim herself –the sole and single frump of the party. The scale of everything was so different that all her minor values, her quainter graces, her little local authority, her humour and her wardrobe alike, for which it was enough elsewhere, among her *bons amis*, that they were hers, dear Fanny Assingham's—these matters and others would be all now as nought : five minutes had sufficed to give her the fatal pitch. In Cadogan Place she could always at the worst be picturesque—for she habitually spoke of herself as "local" to Sloane Street : whereas at Matcham she should never be anything but horrible. And it all would have come, the disaster, from the real refinement in her of the spirit of friendship. To prove to him that she wasn't really watching him—ground for which would have been too terribly grave — she had followed him in his pursuit of pleasure: *so* she might, precisely, mark her detachment. This was handsome trouble for her to take—the Prince could see it all : it wasn't a shade of interference that a good-natured man would visit on her. So he didn't even say, when she told him how frumpy she knew herself, how frumpy her very maid, odiously going back on her, rubbed it into her, night and morning, with unsealed eyes and lips, that *she* now knew her—he didn't then say "Ah see what you've done : isn't it rather your own fault ?" He behaved differently altogether : eminently distinguished himself—for she told him she had never seen him so universally distinguished—he yet distinguished *her* in

her obscurity or in what was worse, her objective absurdity, and frankly invested her with her absolute value, surrounded her with all the importance of her wit. That wit, as discriminated from stature and complexion, a sense for "bridge" and a credit for pearls, *could* have importance was meanwhile but dimly perceived at Matcham; so that his "niceness" to her—she called it only niceness, but it brought tears into her eyes—had the greatness of a general as well as of a special demonstration.

"She understands," he said as a comment on all this to Mrs. Verver—"she understands all she needs to understand. She has taken her time, but she has at last made it out for herself: she sees how all we can desire is to give them the life they prefer, to surround them with the peace and quiet, and above all with the sense of security, most favourable to it. She can't of course very well put it to us that we have, so far as she is concerned, but to make the best of our circumstances; she can't say in so many words 'Don't think of me, for I too must make the best of mine: arrange as you can, only, and live as you must.' I don't get quite *that* from her, any more than I ask for it. But her tone and her whole manner mean nothing at all unless they mean that she trusts us to take as watchful, to take as artful, to take as tender care, in our way, as she so anxiously takes in hers. So that she's—well," the Prince wound up, "what you may call practically all right." Charlotte in fact however, to help out his confidence, didn't call it anything; return as he might to the lucidity, the importance, or whatever it was, of this lesson, she gave him no aid toward reading it aloud. She let him two or three times over spell it out for himself; only on the eve of their visit's end was she for once clear or direct in response. They had found a minute together in the great hall of the house during the half-hour before dinner; this easiest of chances

they had already a couple of times arrived at by waiting persistently till the last other loiterers had gone to dress and by being prepared themselves to dress so expeditiously that they might a little later on be among the first to appear in festal array. The hall then was empty, before the army of rearranging cushion-patting housemaids were marshalled in, and there was a place by the forsaken fire, at one end, where they might imitate with art the unpremeditated. Above all here, for the snatched instants, they could breathe so near to each other that the interval was almost engulfed in it and the intensity both of the union and the caution became a workable substitute for contact. They had prolongations of instants that counted as visions of bliss; they had slow approximations that counted as long caresses. The quality of these passages in truth made the spoken word, and especially the spoken word about other people, fall below them; so that our young woman's tone had even now a certain dryness. "It's very good of her, my dear, to trust us. But what else can she do?"

"Why whatever people do when they don't trust. Let one see they don't."

"But let whom see?"

"Well, let *me*, say, to begin with."

"And should you mind that?"

He had a slight show of surprise. "Shouldn't you?"

"Her letting you see——? No," said Charlotte; "the only thing I can imagine myself minding is what you yourself, if you don't look out, may let *her* see." To which she added: "You may let her see, you know, that you're afraid."

"I'm only afraid of *you*, a little, at moments," he presently returned. "But I shan't let Fanny see that."

It was clear however that neither the limits nor the

extent of Mrs. Assingham's vision were now a real concern to her, and she gave expression to this as she hadn't even yet done. "What in the world can she do against us? There's not a word that she can breathe. She's helpless; she can't speak; she'd be herself the first to be dished by it." And then as he seemed slow to follow: "It all comes back to her. It all began with her. Everything from the first. She introduced you to Maggie. She made your marriage."

The Prince might have had his moment of demur, but at this, after a little, as with a smile dim but deep, he came on. "Mayn't she also be said a good deal to have made yours? That was intended, I think, wasn't it? for a kind of rectification."

Charlotte, on her side, for an instant, hesitated; then she was prompter still. "I don't mean there was anything to rectify; everything was as it had to be, and I'm not speaking of how she may have been concerned for you and me. I'm speaking of how she took, in her way, each time, *their* lives in hand, and how therefore that ties her up to-day. She can't go to them and say 'It's very awkward of course, you poor dear things, but I was frivolously mistaken.'"

He took it in still, with his long look at her. "All the more that she wasn't. She was right Everything's right," he went on, "and everything will stay so."

"Then that's all I say."

But he worked it out, for the deeper satisfaction, even to superfluous lucidity. "We're happy—and they're happy. What more does the position admit of? What more need Fanny Assingham want?"

"Ah my dear," said Charlotte, "it's not I who say that she need want anything. I only say that she's *fixed*, that she must stand exactly where everything has, by her own act, placed her. It's you who have

seemed haunted with the possibility for her of some injurious alternative, something or other we must be prepared for." And she had with her high reasoning a strange cold smile. "We *are* prepared—for anything, for everything; and *as* we are, practically, so she must take us. She's condemned to consistency; she's doomed, poor thing, to a genial optimism. That, luckily for her however, is very much the law of her nature. She was born to soothe and to smooth. Now then therefore," Mrs. Verver gently laughed, "she has the chance of her life!"

"So that her present professions may even at the best not be sincere?—may be but a mask for doubts and fears and for gaining time?"

The Prince had looked, with the question, as if this again could trouble him, and it determined in his companion a slight impatience. "You keep talking about such things as if they were our affair at all. I feel at any rate that I've nothing to do with her doubts and fears or with anything she may feel. She must arrange all that for herself. It's enough for me that she'll always be of necessity much more afraid for herself, *really*, either to see or to speak, than we should be to have her do it even if we were the idiots and cowards we aren't." And Charlotte's face, with these words—to the mitigation of the slightly hard ring there might otherwise have been in them—fairly lightened, softened, shone out. It reflected as really never yet the rare felicity of their luck. It made her look for the moment as if she had actually pronounced that word of unpermitted presumption—so apt is the countenance, as with a finer consciousness than the tongue, to betray a sense of this particular lapse. She might indeed the next instant have seen her friend wince, in advance, at her use of a word that *was* already on her lips; for it was still unmistakable with him that there were things he could prize, forms of

fortune he could cherish, without at all proportionately liking their names. Had all this, however, been even completely present to his companion, what other term could she have applied to the strongest and simplest of her ideas but the one that exactly fitted it? She applied it then, though her own instinct moved her at the same time to pay her tribute to the good taste from which they hadn't heretofore by a hair's breadth deviated. "If it didn't sound so vulgar I should say that we're — fatally, as it were — *safe*. Pardon the low expression—since it's what we happen to be. We're so because *they* are. And they're so because they can't be anything else from the moment that, having originally intervened for them, she wouldn't now be able to bear herself if she didn't keep them so. That's the way she's inevitably *with* us," said Charlotte over her smile. "We hang essentially together."

Well, the Prince candidly allowed she did bring it home to him. Every way it worked out. "Yes, I see. We hang essentially together."

His friend had a shrug—a shrug that had a grace. "*Cosa volete?*" The effect, beautifully, nobly, was more than Roman. "Ah beyond doubt it's a case."

He stood looking at her. "It's a case. There can't," he said, "have been many."

"Perhaps never, never, never any other. That," she smiled, "I confess I should like to think. Only ours."

"Only ours — most probably. *Speriamo.*" To which, as after hushed connexions, he presently added: "Poor Fanny!" But Charlotte had already with a start and a warning hand turned from a glance at the clock. She sailed away to dress, while he watched her reach the staircase. His eyes followed her till, with a simple swift look round at him, she vanished.

Something in the sight however appeared to have renewed the spring of his last exclamation, which he breathed again upon the air. "Poor, poor Fanny!"

It was to prove on the morrow quite consistent with the spirit of these words that, the party at Matcham breaking up and multitudinously dispersing, he should be able to meet the question of the social side of the process of returning to whence he had come with due presence of mind. It was impossible, for reasons, that he should travel to town with the Assinghams; it was impossible for the same reasons that he should travel to town save in the conditions that he had for the last twenty-four hours been privately, and it might have been said profoundly, thinking out. The result of his thought was already precious to him, and this put at his service, he sufficiently believed, the right tone for disposing of his elder friend's suggestion, an assumption in fact equally full and mild, that he and Charlotte would conveniently take the same train and occupy the same compartment as the Colonel and herself. The extension of the idea to Mrs. Verver had been precisely a part of Mrs. Assingham's mildness, and nothing could better have characterised her sense for social shades than her easy perception that the gentleman from Portland Place and the lady from Eaton Square might now confess, quite without indiscretion, to simultaneity of movement. She had made, for the four days, no direct appeal to the latter personage, but the Prince was accidental witness of her taking a fresh start at the moment the company were about to scatter for the last night of their stay. There had been, at this climax, the usual preparatory talk about hours and combinations, in the midst of which poor Fanny gently approached Mrs. Verver. She said "You and the Prince, love"—quite, apparently, without blinking; she took for granted their public withdrawal together; she remarked that she and Bob

were alike ready, in the interest of sociability, to take any train that would make them all one party. "I feel really as if all this time I had seen nothing of you" —that gave an added grace to the candour of the dear thing's approach. But just then it was on the other hand that the young man found himself borrow most effectively the secret of the right tone for doing as he preferred. His preference had during the evening not failed of occasion to press him with mute insistences; practically without words, without any sort of straight telegraphy, it had arrived at a felt identity with Charlotte's own. She spoke all for their friend while she answered their friend's question, but she none the less signalled to him as definitely as if she had fluttered a white handkerchief from a window. "It's awfully sweet of you, darling — our going together would be charming. But you mustn't mind us—you must suit yourselves: we've settled, Amerigo and I, to stay over till after luncheon."

Amerigo, with the chink of this gold in his ear, turned straight away, so as not to be instantly appealed to; and for the very emotion of the wonder, furthermore, of what divination may achieve when winged by a community of passion. Charlotte had uttered the exact plea that he had been keeping ready for the same foreseen necessity, and had uttered it simply as a consequence of their deepening unexpressed need of each other and without the passing between them of a word. He hadn't, God knew, to take it from her—he was too conscious of what he wanted; but the lesson for him was in the straight clear tone that Charlotte could thus distil, in the perfect felicity of her adding no explanation, no touch for plausibility, that she wasn't strictly obliged to add, and in the truly superior way in which women so situated express and distinguish themselves. She had answered Mrs. Assingham quite adequately; she

hadn't spoiled it by a reason a scrap larger than the smallest that would serve, and she had, above all, thrown off, for his stretched but covered attention, an image that flashed like a mirror played at the face of the sun. The measure of *everything*, to all his sense at these moments, was in it—the measure especially of the thought that had been growing with him a positive obsession and that began to throb as never yet under this brush of her having, by perfect parity of imagination, the match for it. His whole consciousness had by this time begun almost to ache with a truth of an exquisite order, at the glow of which she too had so unmistakably then been warming herself —the truth that the occasion constituted by the last few days couldn't possibly, save by some poverty of their own, refuse them some still other and still greater beauty. It had already told them, with an hourly voice, that it had a meaning—a meaning that their associated sense was to drain even as thirsty lips, after the plough through the sands and the sight, afar, of the palm-cluster, might drink in at last the promised well in the desert. There had been beauty day after day, and there had been for the spiritual lips something of the pervasive taste of it ; yet it was all nevertheless as if their response had remained below their fortune. How to bring it by some brave free lift up to the same height was the idea with which, behind and beneath everything, he was restlessly occupied, and in the exploration of which, as in that of the sun-chequered greenwood of romance, his spirit thus, at the opening of a vista, met hers. They were already from that moment so hand-in-hand in the place that he found himself making use five minutes later of exactly the same tone as Charlotte's for telling Mrs. Assingham that he was likewise in the matter of the return to London sorry for what mightn't be.

This had become of a sudden the simplest thing in the world—the sense of which moreover seemed really to amount to a portent that he should feel for evermore, on the general head, conveniently at his ease with her. He went in fact a step further than Charlotte—put the latter forward as creating his necessity. She was staying over luncheon to oblige their hostess —as a consequence of which he must also stay to see her decently home. He must deliver her safe and sound, he felt, in Eaton Square. Regret as he might too the difference made by this obligation, he frankly didn't mind, inasmuch as, over and above the pleasure itself, his scruple would certainly gratify both Mr. Verver and Maggie. They never yet had absolutely and entirely learned, he even found deliberation to intimate, how little he really neglected the first—as it seemed nowadays quite to have become—of his domestic duties : therefore he still constantly felt how little he must remit his effort to make them remark it. To which he added with equal lucidity that they would return in time for dinner, and if he didn't, as a last word, subjoin that it would be "lovely" of Fanny to find, on her own return, a moment to go to Eaton Square and report them as struggling bravely on, this wasn't because the impulse, down to the very name for the amiable act, altogether failed to rise. His inward assurance, his general plan, had at moments, where she was concerned, its drops of continuity, and nothing would less have pleased him than that she should suspect in him, however tempted, any element of conscious "cheek." But he was always —that was really the upshot—cultivating thanklessly the considerate and the delicate : it was a long lesson, this unlearning, with people of English race, *all* the little superstitions that accompany friendship. Mrs. Assingham herself was the first to say that she would unfailingly "report"; she brought it out in fact,

he thought, quite wonderfully—having attained the summit of the wonderful during the brief interval that had separated her appeal to Charlotte from this passage with himself. She had taken the five minutes, obviously, amid the rest of the talk and the movement, to retire into her tent for meditation—which showed, among several things, the impression Charlotte had made on her. It was from the tent she emerged as with arms refurbished; though who indeed could say if the manner in which she now met him spoke most, really, of the glitter of battle or of the white waver of the flag of truce? The parley was short either way; the gallantry of her offer was all sufficient.

"I'll go to our friends then—I'll ask for luncheon. I'll tell them when to expect you."

"That will be charming. Say we're all right."

"All right—precisely. I can't say more," Mrs. Assingham smiled.

"No doubt." But he considered as for the possible importance of it. "Neither can you, by what I seem to feel, say less."

"Oh I *won't* say less!" Fanny laughed; with which the next moment she had turned away. But they had it again, not less bravely, on the morrow, after breakfast, in the thick of the advancing carriages and the exchange of farewells. "I think I'll send home my maid from Euston," she was then prepared to amend, "and go to Eaton Square straight. So you can be easy."

"Oh I think we're easy," the Prince returned. "Be sure to *say*, at any rate, that we're bearing up."

"You're bearing up—good. And Charlotte returns to dinner?"

"To dinner. We're not likely, I think, to make another night away."

"Well then I wish you at least a pleasant day."

"Oh," he laughed as they separated, "we shall do our best for it!"—after which, in due course, with the announcement of their conveyance, the Assinghams rolled off.

IX

It was quite for the Prince after this as if the view had further cleared; so that the half-hour during which he strolled on the terrace and smoked—the day being lovely—overflowed with the plenitude of its particular quality. Its general brightness was composed doubtless of many elements, but what shone out of it as if the whole place and time had been a great picture, from the hand of genius, presented to him as a prime ornament for his collection and all varnished and framed to hand up—what marked it especially for the highest appreciation was his extraordinarily unchallenged, his absolutely appointed and enhanced possession of it. Poor Fanny Assingham's challenge amounted to nothing: one of the things he thought of while he leaned on the old marble balustrade—so like others that he knew in still more nobly-terraced Italy—was that she was squared, all-conveniently even to herself, and that, rumbling toward London with this contentment, she had become an image irrelevant to the scene. It further passed across him—as his imagination was, for reasons, during the time, unprecedentedly active—that he had after all gained more from women than he had ever lost by them; there appeared so, more and more, on those mystic books that are kept, in connexion with such commerce, even by men of the loosest business habits, a balance in his favour that he could

pretty well as a rule take for granted. What were they doing at this very moment, wonderful creatures, but trying to outdo each other in his interest ?—from Maggie herself, most wonderful in her way of all, to his hostess of the present hour, into whose head it had so inevitably come to keep Charlotte on, for particular reasons, and who had asked in this benevolent spirit why in the world, if not obliged, without plausibility, to hurry, her husband's son-in-law shouldn't wait over in her company. He would at least see, Lady Castledean had said, that nothing dreadful should happen to her either while still there or during the exposure of the run to town ; and, for that matter, if they exceeded a little their license it would positively help them to have done so together. Each of them would in this way have the other comfortably to complain of at home. All of which, besides, in Lady Castledean as in Maggie, in Fanny Assingham as in Charlotte herself, was working for him without provocation or pressure, by the mere play of some vague sense on their part—definite and conscious at the most only in Charlotte—that he wasn't, as a nature, as a character, as a gentleman, in fine, below his remarkable fortune.

But there were more things before him than even these ; things that melted together, almost indistinguishably, to feed his sense of beauty. If the outlook was in every way spacious—and the towers of three cathedrals, in different counties, as had been pointed out to him, gleamed discernibly, like dim silver, in the rich sameness of tone—didn't he somehow the more feel it so because, precisely, Lady Castledean had kept over a man of her own, and that this offered a certain sweet intelligibility as the note of the day ? It made everything fit ; above all it diverted him to the extent of keeping up, while he lingered and waited, his meditative smile. She had detained

Charlotte because she wished to detain Mr. Blint, and she couldn't detain Mr. Blint, disposed though he clearly was to oblige her, without spreading over the act some ampler drapery. Castledean had gone up to London; the place was all her own; she had had a fancy for a quiet morning with Mr. Blint, a sleek civil accomplished young man—distinctly younger than her ladyship—who played and sang delightfully (played even "bridge" and sang the English-comic as well as the French-tragic), and the presence—which really meant the absence—of a couple of other friends, if they were happily chosen, would make everything all right. The Prince had the sense, all good-humouredly, of being happily chosen, and it wasn't spoiled for him even by another sense that followed in its train and with which during his life in England he had more than once had reflectively to deal: the state of being reminded how after all, as an outsider, a foreigner, and even as a mere representative husband and son-in-law, he was so irrelevant to the working of affairs that he could be bent on occasion to uses comparatively trivial. No other of her guests would have been thus convenient for their hostess; affairs, of whatever sorts, had claimed, by early trains, every active easy smoothly-working man, each in his way a lubricated item of the great social political administrative *engrenage*—claimed most of all Castledean himself, who was so very oddly, given the personage and the type, rather a large item. If he, the great and the clever Roman, on the other hand, had an affair, it wasn't of that order; it was of the order verily that he had been reduced to as to a not quite glorious substitute.

It marked however the feeling of the hour with the Prince that this vision of being "reduced" interfered not at all with the measure of his actual ease. It kept before him again at moments the so familiar fact of

his sacrifices—down to the idea of the very relinquishment, for his wife's convenience, of his real situation in the world; with the consequence thus that he was, in the last analysis, among all these so often inferior people, practically held cheap and made light of. But though all this was sensible enough there was a spirit in him that could rise above it, a spirit that positively played with the facts, with all of them; from that of the droll ambiguity of English relations to that of his having in mind something quite beautiful and independent and harmonious, something wholly his own. He couldn't somehow take Mr. Blint seriously—he was much more an outsider, by the larger scale, even than a Roman prince who consented to be in abeyance. Yet it was past finding out, either, how such a woman as Lady Castledean could take him—since this question but sank for him again into the fathomless depths of English equivocation. He knew them all, as was said, "well"; he had lived with them, stayed with them, dined, hunted, shot and done various other things with them; but the number of questions about them he couldn't have answered had much rather grown than shrunken, so that experience struck him for the most part as having left in him but one residual impression. They didn't like *les situations nettes*—that was all he was very sure of. They wouldn't have them at any price; it had been their national genius and their national success to avoid them at every point. They called it themselves, with complacency, their wonderful spirit of compromise—the very influence of which actually so hung about him here from moment to moment that the earth and the air, the light and the colour, the fields and the hills and the sky, the blue-green counties and the cold cathedrals, owed to it every accent of their tone. Verily, as one had to feel in presence of such a picture,

it had succeeded ; it had made, up to now, for that seated solidity in the rich sea-mist on which the garish, the supposedly envious, peoples have ever cooled their eyes. But it was at the same time precisely why even much initiation left one at given moments so puzzled as to the elements of staleness in all the freshness and of freshness in all the staleness, of innocence in the guilt and of guilt in the innocence. There were other marble terraces, sweeping more purple prospects, on which he would have known what to think, and would have enjoyed thereby at least the small intellectual fillip of a discerned relation between a given appearance and a taken meaning. The inquiring mind, in these present conditions, might, it was true, be more sharply challenged ; but the result of its attention and its ingenuity, it had unluckily learned to know, was too often to be confronted with a mere dead wall, a lapse of logic, a confirmed bewilderment. And moreover above all nothing mattered, in the relation of the enclosing scene to his own consciousness, but its very most direct bearings.

Lady Castledean's dream of Mr. Blint for the morning was doubtless already, with all the spacious harmonies re-established, taking the form of " going over " something with him, at the piano, in one of the numerous smaller rooms that were consecrated to the less gregarious uses ; what she had wished had been effected—her convenience had been assured. This made him however ask himself the more where Charlotte was—since he didn't at all suppose her to be making a tactless third, which would be to have accepted mere spectatorship, in the duet of their companions. The upshot of everything for him, alike of the less and of the more, was that the exquisite day bloomed there like a large fragrant flower that he had only to gather. But it was to Charlotte

he wished to make the offering, and as he moved along the terrace, which rendered visible parts of two sides of the house, he looked up at all the windows that were open to the April morning and wondered which of them would represent his friend's room. It befell thus that his question was after no long time answered ; he saw Charlotte appear above as if she had been called by the pausing of his feet on the flags. She had come to the sill, on which she leaned to look down, and she remained there a minute smiling at him. He had been immediately struck with her wearing a hat and a jacket—which conduced to her appearance of readiness not so much to join him, with a beautiful uncovered head and a parasol, where he stood, as to take with him some larger step altogether. The larger step had been since the evening before intensely in his own mind, though he hadn't fully thought out even yet the slightly difficult detail of it ; but he had had no chance, such as he needed, to speak the definite word to her, and the face she now showed affected him thereby as a notice that she had wonderfully guessed it for herself. They had these identities of impulse—they had had them repeatedly before ; and if such unarranged but unerring encounters gave the measure of the degree in which people were, in the common phrase, meant for each other, no union in the world had ever been more sweetened with rightness. What in fact most often happened was that her rightness went, as who should say, even further than his own ; they were conscious of the same necessity at the same moment, only it was she who as a general thing most clearly saw her way to it. Something in her long look at him now out of the old grey window, something in the very poise of her hat, the colour of her necktie, the prolonged stillness of her smile, touched with sudden light for him all the wealth of the fact that he could

count on her. He had his hand there, to pluck it, on the open bloom of the day ; but what did the bright minute mean but that her answering hand was already intelligently out ? So therefore while the minute lasted it passed between them that their cup was full ; which cup their very eyes, holding it fast, carried and steadied and began, as they tasted it, to praise. He broke however after a moment the silence.

" It only wants a moon, a mandolin and a little danger to be a serenade."

" Ah then," she lightly called down, " let it at least have *this* ! " With which she detached a rich white rosebud from its company with another in the front of her dress and flung it down to him.

He caught it in its fall, fixing her again after she had watched him place it in his buttonhole. " Come down quickly ! " he said in an Italian not loud but deep.

" *Vengo, vengo !* " she as clearly, but more lightly, tossed out ; and she had left him the next minute to wait for her.

He came along the terrace again, with pauses during which his eyes rested, as they had already often done, on the brave darker wash of far-away water-colour that represented the most distant of the cathedral towns. This place, with its great church and its high accessibility, its towers that distinguishably signalled, its English history, its appealing type, its acknowledged interest, this place had sounded its name to him half the night through, and its name had become but another name, the pronounceable and convenient one, for that supreme sense of things which now throbbed within him. He had kept saying to himself " Glo'ster, Glo'ster, Glo'ster," quite as if the sharpest meaning of all the years just ended were intensely expressed in it. That meaning was really that his situation remained quite sublimely

consistent with itself, and that they absolutely, he and Charlotte, stood there together in the very lustre of this truth. Every present circumstance helped to proclaim it ; it was blown into their faces as by the lips of the morning. He knew why he had from the first of his marriage tried with such patience for such conformity ; he knew why he had given up so much and bored himself so much ; he knew why he had at any rate gone in, on the basis of all forms, on the basis of his having in a manner sold himself, for a *situation nette.* It had all been just in order that his —well, what on earth should he call it but his freedom ?—should at present be as perfect and rounded and lustrous as some huge precious pearl. He hadn't struggled nor snatched ; he was taking but what had been given him ; the pearl dropped itself, with its exquisite quality and rarity, straight into his hand. Here precisely it was, incarnate ; its size and its value grew as Mrs. Verver appeared, afar off, in one of the smaller doorways. She came toward him in silence while he moved to meet her ; the great scale of this particular front, at Matcham, multiplied thus, in the golden morning, the stages of their meeting and the successions of their consciousness. It wasn't till she had come quite close that he produced for her his " Glo'ster, Glo'ster, Glo'ster," and his " Look at it over there ! "

She knew just where to look. " Yes—isn't it one of the best ? There are cloisters or towers or something." And her eyes, which, though her lips smiled, were almost grave with their depths of acceptance, came back to him. " Or the tomb of some old king."

" We must see the old king ; we must ' do ' the cathedral," he said ; " we must know all about it. If we could but take," he exhaled, " the full opportunity ! " And then while, for all they seemed to give him, he sounded again her eyes : " I feel the day

like a great gold cup that we must somehow drain together."

"I feel it, as you always make me feel everything, just as you do; so that I know ten miles off how you feel! But do you remember," she asked, "apropos of great gold cups, the beautiful one, the real one, that I offered you so long ago and that you wouldn't have? Just before your marriage"—she brought it back to him: "the gilded crystal bowl in the little Bloomsbury shop."

"Oh yes!"—but it took, with a slight surprise on the Prince's part, some small recollecting. "The treacherous cracked thing you wanted to palm off on me, and the little swindling Jew who understood Italian and who backed you up! But I feel this an occasion," he immediately added, "and I hope you don't mean," he smiled, "that *as* an occasion it's also cracked."

They spoke, naturally, more low than loud, overlooked as they were, though at a respectful distance, by tiers of windows; but it made each find in the other's voice a taste as of something slowly and deeply absorbed. "Don't you think too much of 'cracks' and aren't you too afraid of them? I risk the cracks," said Charlotte, "and I've often recalled the bowl and the little swindling Jew, wondering if they've parted company. He made," she said, "a great impression on me."

"Well, you also, no doubt, made a great impression on him, and I daresay that if you were to go back to him you'd find he has been keeping that treasure for you. But as to cracks," the Prince went on—"what did you tell me the other day you prettily call them in English? 'rifts within the lute'?—risk them as much as you like for yourself, but don't risk them for me." He spoke it in all the gaiety of his just barely-tremulous serenity. "I go, as you know, by

my superstitions. And that's why," he said, "I know where we are. They're every one to-day on our side."

Resting on the parapet toward the great view she was silent a little, and he saw the next moment that her eyes were closed. "I go but by one thing." Her hand was on the sun-warmed stone; so that, turned as they were away from the house, he put his own upon it and covered it. "I go by *you*," she said. "I go by you."

So they remained a moment, till he spoke again with a gesture that matched. "What's really our great necessity, you know, is to go by my watch. It's already eleven"—he had looked at the time; "so that if we stop here to luncheon what becomes of our afternoon?"

To this Charlotte's eyes opened straight. "There's not the slightest need of our stopping here to luncheon. Don't you see," she asked, "how I'm ready?"

He had taken it in, but there was always more and more of her. "You mean you've arranged——?"

"It's easy to arrange. My maid goes up with my things. You've only to speak to your man about yours, and they can go together."

"You mean we can leave at once?"

She let him have it all. "One of the carriages, about which I spoke, will already have come back for us. If your superstitions are on our side," she smiled, "so my arrangements are, and I'll back my support against yours."

"Then you had thought," he wondered, "about Gloucester?"

She hesitated — but it was only her way. "I thought *you* would think. We have, thank goodness, these harmonies. They're food for superstition if you like. It's beautiful," she went on, "that it should be Gloucester; 'Glo'ster Glo'ster,' as you say, making it sound like an old song. However, I'm sure 'Glo'ster

Glo'ster' will be charming," she still added; "we shall be able easily to lunch there, and, with our luggage and our servants off our hands, we shall have at least three or four hours. We can wire," she wound up, "from there."

Ever so quietly she had brought it, as she had thought it, all out, and it had to be as covertly that he let his appreciation expand. "Then Lady Castledean——?"

"Doesn't dream of our staying."

He took it, but thinking yet. "Then what does she dream——?"

"Of Mr. Blint, poor dear; of Mr. Blint only." Her smile for him—for the Prince himself—was free. "Have I positively to tell you that she doesn't want us? She only wanted us for the others—to show she wasn't left alone with him. Now that that's done and that they've all gone she of course knows for herself——!"

"'Knows'?" the Prince vaguely echoed.

"Why that we like cathedrals; that we inevitably stop to see them, or go round to take them in, whenever we've a chance; that it's what our respective families quite expect of us and would be disappointed for us to fail of. This, as *forestieri*," Mrs. Verver pursued, "would be our pull—if our pull weren't indeed so great all round."

He could only keep his eyes on her. "And have you made out the very train——?"

"The very one. Paddington—the 6.50 'in.' That gives us oceans; we can dine, at the usual hour, at home; and as Maggie will of course be in Eaton Square I hereby invite you."

For a while he still but looked at her; it was a minute before he spoke. "Thank you very much. With pleasure." To which he in a moment added: "But the train for Gloucester?"

"A local one—11.22; with several stops, but doing it a good deal, I forget how much, within the hour. So that we've time. Only," she said, "we must employ our time."

He roused himself as from the mere momentary spell of her; he looked again at his watch while they moved back to the door through which she had advanced. But he had also again questions and stops—all as for the mystery and the charm. "You looked it up—without my having asked you?"

"Ah my dear," she laughed, "I've seen you with Bradshaw! It takes Anglo-Saxon blood."

"'Blood'?" he echoed. "You've that of every race!" It kept her before him. "You're terrible."

Well, he could put it as he liked. "I know the name of the inn."

"What is it then?"

"There are two—you'll see. But I've chosen the right one. And I think I remember the tomb," she smiled.

"Oh the tomb——!" Any tomb would do for him. "But I mean I had been keeping my idea so cleverly for you while there you already were with it."

"You had been keeping it 'for' me as much as you like. But how do you make out," she asked, "that you were keeping it *from* me?"

"I don't—now. How shall I ever keep anything—some day when I shall wish to?"

"Ah for things I mayn't want to know I promise you shall find me stupid." They had reached their door, where she herself paused to explain. "These days, yesterday, last night, this morning, I've wanted everything."

Well, it was all right. "You shall *have* everything."

X

FANNY, on her arrival in town, carried out her second idea, despatching the Colonel to his club for luncheon and packing her maid into a cab, for Cadogan Place, with the variety of their effects. The result of this for each of the pair was a state of occupation so unbroken that the day practically passed without fresh contact between them. They dined out together, but it was both in going to their dinner and in coming back that they appeared on either side to have least to communicate. Fanny was wrapped in her thoughts still more closely than in the lemon-coloured mantle that protected her bare shoulders, and her husband, with her silence to deal with, showed himself not less disposed than usual, when so challenged, to hold up, as he would have said, his end of it. They had in general in these days longer pauses and more abrupt transitions ; in one of which latter they found themselves, for a climax, launched at midnight. Mrs. Assingham, rather wearily housed again, ascended to the first floor, there to sink overburdened, on the landing outside the drawing-room, into a great gilded Venetian chair—of which at first however she but made, with her brooding face, a sort of throne of meditation. She would thus have recalled a little, with her so free orientalism of type, the immemorially speechless Sphinx about at last to become articulate. The Colonel, not unlike, on his side, some old pilgrim

of the desert camping at the foot of that monument, went by way of reconnoissance into the drawing-room. He visited according to his wont the windows and their fastenings ; he cast round the place the eye all at once of the master and the manager, the commandant and the rate-payer ; then he came back to his wife, before whom for a moment he stood waiting. But she herself continued for a time to wait, only looking up at him inscrutably. There was in these minor manœuvres and conscious patiences something of a suspension of their old custom of divergent discussion, that intercourse by misunderstanding which had grown so clumsy now. This familiar pleasantry seemed to desire to show it could yield on occasion to any clear trouble ; though it was also sensibly and just incoherently in the air that no trouble was at present to be vulgarly recognised as clear.

There might, for that matter, even have been in Mrs. Assingham's face a mild perception of some finer sense—a sense for his wife's situation, and the very situation she was, oddly enough, about to repudiate —that she had fairly caused to grow in him. But it was a flower to breathe upon gently, and this was very much what she finally did. She knew he needed no telling that she had given herself all the afternoon to her friends in Eaton Square, and that her doing so would have been but the prompt result of impressions gathered, in quantities, in brimming baskets, like the purple grapes of the vintage, at Matcham ; a process surrounded by him, while it so unmistakably went on, with abstentions and discretions that might almost have counted as solemnities. The solemnities, at the same time, had committed him to nothing—to nothing beyond this confession itself of a consciousness of deep waters. She had been out on these waters for him, visibly ; and his tribute to the fact had been his keeping her, even if without a word, well

in sight. He hadn't quitted for an hour, during her adventure, the shore of the mystic lake; he had on the contrary stationed himself where she could signal to him at need. Her need would have arisen if the planks of her bark had parted—*then* some sort of plunge would have become his immediate duty. His present position, clearly, was that of seeing her in the centre of her sheet of dark water, and of wondering if her actual mute gaze at him didn't perhaps mean that her planks *were* now parting. He held himself so ready that it was quite as if the inward man had pulled off coat and waistcoat. Before he had plunged, however—that is before he had uttered a question—he saw, not without relief, that she was making for land. He watched her steadily paddle, always a little nearer, and at last he felt her boat bump. The bump was distinct, and in fact she stepped ashore. "We were all wrong. There's nothing."

"Nothing——?" It was like giving her his hand up the bank.

"Between Charlotte Verver and the Prince. I was uneasy—but I'm satisfied now. I was in fact quite mistaken. There's nothing."

"But I thought," said Bob Assingham, "that that was just what you did persistently asseverate. You've guaranteed their straightness from the first."

"No—I've never till now guaranteed anything but my own disposition to worry. I've never till now," Fanny went on gravely from her chair, "had such a chance to see and to judge. I had it at that place—if I had, in my infatuation and my folly," she added with expression, "nothing else. So I did see—I *have* seen. And now I know." Her emphasis, as she repeated the word, made her head, in her seat of infallibility, rise higher. "I know."

The Colonel took it—but took it at first in silence. "Do you mean they've *told* you——?"

"No—I mean nothing so absurd. For in the first place I haven't asked them, and in the second their word in such a matter wouldn't count."

"Oh," said the Colonel with all his oddity, "they'd tell *us*."

It made her face him an instant as with her old impatience of his short cuts, always across her finest flower-beds; but she felt none the less that she kept her irony down. "Then when they've told you, you'll be perhaps so good as to let me know."

He jerked up his chin, testing the growth of his beard with the back of his hand while he fixed her with a single eye. "Ah I don't say that they'd necessarily tell me that they *are* over the traces."

"They'll necessarily, whatever happens, hold their tongues, I hope, and I'm talking of them now as I take them for myself only. *That's* enough for me—it's all I have to regard." With which, after an instant, "They're wonderful," said Fanny Assingham.

"Indeed," her husband concurred, "I really think they are."

"You'd think it still more if you knew. But you don't know—because you don't see. Their situation"—this was what he didn't see—"is too extraordinary."

"'Too'——?" He was willing to try.

"Too extraordinary to be believed, I mean, if one didn't see. But just that, in a way, is what saves them. They take it seriously."

He followed at his own pace. "Their situation?"

"The incredible side of it. They make it credible."

"Credible then—you do say—to *you*?"

She looked at him again for an interval. "They believe in it themselves. They take it for what it is. And that," she said, "saves them."

"But if what it 'is' is just their chance——?"

"It's their chance for what I told you when Charlotte first turned up. It's their chance for the idea that I was then sure she had."

The Colonel showed his effort to recall. "Oh your idea, at different moments, of any one of *their* ideas!" This dim procession, visibly, mustered before him, and, with the best will in the world, he could but watch its immensity. "Are you speaking now of something to which you can comfortably settle down?"

Again for a little she only glowered at him. "I've come back to my belief, and that I have done so——"

"Well?" he asked as she paused.

"Well, shows I'm right—for I assure you I had wandered far. Now I'm at home again, and I mean," said Fanny Assingham, "to stay here. They're beautiful," she declared.

"The Prince and Charlotte?"

"The Prince and Charlotte. *That's* how they're so remarkable. And the beauty," she explained, "is that they're afraid for them. Afraid I mean for the others."

"For Mr. Verver and Maggie?" It did take some following. "Afraid of what?"

"Afraid of themselves."

The Colonel wondered. "Of '*them*selves'? Of Mr. Verver's and Maggie's selves?"

Mrs. Assingham remained patient as well as lucid. "Yes—of *such* blindness too. But most of all of their own danger."

He turned it over. "That danger *being* the blindness——?"

"That danger being their position. What their position contains—of all the elements—I needn't at this time of day attempt to tell you. It contains, luckily—for that's the mercy—everything *but* blind-

ness : I mean on their part. The blindness," said Fanny, " is primarily her husband's."

He stood for a moment ; he *would* have it straight. " Whose husband's ? "

" Mr. Verver's," she went on. " The blindness is most of all his. That they feel—that they see. But it's also his wife's."

" Whose wife's ? " he asked as she continued to gloom at him in a manner at variance with the comparative cheer of her contention. And then as she only gloomed : " The Prince's ? "

" Maggie's own—Maggie's very own," she pursued as for her self.

He had a pause. " Do you think Maggie so blind ? "

" The question isn't of what I think. The question's of the conviction that guides the Prince and Charlotte—who have better opportunities than I for judging."

The Colonel again wondered. " Are you so very sure their opportunities are better ? "

" Well," his wife asked, " what is their whole so extraordinary situation, their extraordinary relation, but an opportunity ? "

" Ah my dear, you have that opportunity—of their extraordinary situation and relation — as much as they."

" With the difference, darling," she returned with some spirit, " that neither of those matters are, if you please, mine. I *see* the boat they're in, but I'm not, thank God, in it myself. To-day, however," Mrs. Assingham added, " to-day in Eaton Square I did see."

" Well then what ? "

But she mused over it still. " Oh many things. More somehow than ever before. It was as if, God help me, I was seeing *for* them—I mean for the

others. It was as if something had happened—I don't know what, except some effect of these days with them at that place—that had either made things come out or had cleared my own eyes." These eyes indeed of the poor lady's rested on her companion's meanwhile with the lustre not so much of intenser insight as of a particular portent that he had at various other times had occasion to recognise. She desired obviously to reassure him, but it apparently took a couple of large candid gathering glittering tears to emphasise the fact. They had immediately for him their usual direct action: she must reassure him, he was made to feel, absolutely in her own way. He'd adopt it and conform to it as soon as he should be able to make it out. The only thing was that it took such incalculable twists and turns. The twist seemed remarkable for instance as she developed her indication of what had come out in the afternoon. "It was as if I knew better than ever what makes them——"

"What makes them?"—he pressed her as she fitfully dropped.

"Well, makes the Prince and Charlotte take it all as they do. It might well have been difficult to know *how* to take it; and they may even say for themselves that they were a long time trying to see. As I say, to-day," she went on, "it was as if I were suddenly, with a kind of horrible push, seeing through their eyes." On which, as to shake off her perversity, Fanny Assingham sprang up. But she remained there under the dim illumination, and while the Colonel, with his high dry spare look of "type," to which a certain conformity to the whiteness of inaccessible snows in his necktie, shirt-front and waistcoat gave a rigour of accent, waited, watching her, they might, at the late hour and in the still house, have been a pair of specious worldly adventurers driven for relief under

sudden stress to some grim midnight reckoning in an odd corner. Her attention moved mechanically over the objects of ornament disposed too freely on the walls of staircase and landing, as to which recognition, for the time, had lost both fondness and compunction. "I can imagine the way it works," she said; "it's so easy to understand. Yet I don't want to be wrong," she the next moment broke out—"I don't, I don't want to be wrong!"

"To make a mistake, you mean?"

Oh no, she meant nothing of the sort; she knew but too well what she meant. "I don't make mistakes. But I perpetrate — in thought — crimes." And she spoke with all intensity. "I'm a most dreadful person. There are times when I seem not to mind a bit what I've done, or what I think or imagine or fear or accept; when I feel that I'd do it again—feel that I'd do things myself."

"Ah my dear!" the Colonel remarked in the coolness of debate.

"Yes, if you had driven me back on my 'nature.' Luckily for you you never have. You've done everything else, but you've never done that. But what I really don't a bit want," she declared, "is to abet them or to protect them."

Her companion turned this over. "What is there to protect them from?—if, by your now so settled faith, they've done nothing that justly exposes them."

And it in fact half-pulled her up. "Well, from a sudden scare. From the alarm, I mean, of what Maggie *may* think."

"Yet if your whole idea is that Maggie thinks nothing——?"

She waited again. "It isn't my 'whole' idea. Nothing's my 'whole' idea—for I felt to-day, as I tell you, that there's so much in the air."

"Oh in the air——!" the Colonel dryly breathed.

"Well, what's in the air always *has*—hasn't it?—to come down to the earth. And Maggie," Mrs. Assingham continued, "is a very curious little person. Since I was 'in,' this afternoon, for seeing more than I had ever done—well, I felt *that* too, for some reason, as I hadn't yet felt it."

"For 'some' reason? For what reason?" And then as his wife at first said nothing: "Did she give any sign? Was she in any way different?"

"She's always so different from any one else in the world that it's hard to say when she's different from herself. But she has made me," said Fanny after an instant, "think of her differently. She drove me home."

"Home here?"

"First to Portland Place—on her leaving her father: since she does once in a while leave him. That was to keep me with her a little longer. But she kept the carriage and, after tea there, came with me herself back here. This was also for the same purpose. Then she went home, though I had brought her a message from the Prince that arranged their movements otherwise. He and Charlotte must have arrived—if they *have* arrived—expecting to drive together to Eaton Square and keep Maggie on to dinner there. She has everything there, you know—she has clothes."

The Colonel didn't in fact know, but he gave it his apprehension. "Oh you mean a change?"

"Twenty changes if you like—all sorts of things. She dresses really, Maggie does, as much for her father—and she always did—as for her husband or for herself. She has her room in his house very much as she had it before she was married—and just as the boy has quite a second nursery there, in which Mrs. Noble, when she comes with him, makes herself, I assure you,

at home. *Si bien* that if Charlotte, in her own house, so to speak, should wish a friend or two to stay with her, she really would be scarce able to put them up."

It was a picture into which, as a thrifty entertainer himself, Bob Assingham could more or less enter. "Maggie and the child spread so?"

"Maggie and the child spread so."

Well, he considered. "It *is* rather rum."

"That's all I claim"—she seemed thankful for the word. "I don't say it's anything more—but it *is* distinctly 'rum.'"

Which after an instant the Colonel took up. "'More'? What more *could* it be?"

"It could be that she's unhappy and that she takes her funny little way of consoling herself. For if she *were* unhappy"—Mrs. Assingham had figured it out—"that's just the way I'm convinced she *would* take. But how can she be unhappy, since—as I'm also convinced—she in the midst of everything adores her husband as much as ever?"

The Colonel at this brooded for a little at large. "Then if she's so happy please what's the matter?"

It made his wife almost spring at him. "You think then she's secretly wretched?"

But he threw up his arms in deprecation. "Ah my dear, I give them up to *you*. I've nothing more to suggest."

"Then it's not sweet of you." She spoke at present as if he were frequently sweet. "You admit that it *is* 'rum.'"

And this indeed fixed again for a moment his intention. "Has Charlotte complained of the want of rooms for her friends?"

"Never, that I know of, a word. It isn't the sort of thing she does. And whom has she after all," Mrs. Assingham added, "to complain to?"

"Hasn't she always you?"

"Oh 'me'! Charlotte and I, nowadays——!" She spoke as of a chapter closed. "Yet see the justice I still do her. She strikes me more and more as extraordinary."

A deeper shade, at the re-echo of the word, had come into the Colonel's face. "If they're each and all so extraordinary then, isn't that why one must just resign one's self to wash one's hands of them—to be lost?" Her face however so met the question as if it were but a flicker of the old tone that their trouble had now become too real for—her charged eyes so betrayed the condition of her nerves that he stepped back alertly enough to firmer ground. He had spoken before in this light of a plain man's vision, but he must be something more than a plain man now. "Hasn't she then, Charlotte, always her husband——?"

"To complain to? She'd rather die."

"Oh!"—and Bob Assingham's face, at the vision of such extremities, lengthened for very docility. "Hasn't she the Prince then?"

"For such matters? Oh he doesn't count."

"I thought that was just what—as the basis of our agitation—he does do!"

Mrs. Assingham, however, had her distinction ready. "Not a bit as a person to bore with complaints. The ground of *my* agitation is exactly that she never on any pretext bores him. Not Charlotte!" And in the imagination of Mrs. Verver's superiority to any such mistake she gave, characteristically, something like a toss of her head—as marked a tribute to that lady's general grace, in all the conditions, as the personage referred to doubtless had ever received.

"Ah only Maggie!" With which the Colonel gave a short low gurgle. But it found his wife again prepared.

"No—not *only* Maggie. A great many people in London—and small wonder!—bore him."

"Maggie only worst then?" But it was a question that he had promptly dropped at the returning brush of another, of which she had shortly before sown the seed. "You said just now that he would by this time be back with Charlotte 'if they *have* arrived.' You think it then possible that they really won't have returned?"

His companion exhibited to view, for the idea, a sense of her responsibility; but this was insufficient, clearly, to keep her from entertaining it. "I think there's nothing they're not now capable of—in their so intense good faith."

"Good faith?"—he echoed the words, which had in fact something of an odd ring, critically.

"Their false position. It comes to the same thing." And she bore down with her decision the superficial lack of sequence. "They may very possibly, for a demonstration—as I see them—not have come back."

He could but wonder, at this, how she did see them. "May have bolted somewhere together?"

"May have stayed over at Matcham itself till to-morrow. May have wired home, each of them, since Maggie left me. May have done," Fanny Assingham continued, "God knows what!" She went on suddenly with more emotion—which, at the pressure of some spring of her inner vision, broke out in a wail of distress imperfectly smothered. "Whatever they've done I shall never know. Never, never—because I don't want to and because nothing will induce me. So they may do as they like. But I've worked for them *all*!" She uttered this last with another irrepressible quaver, and the next moment her tears had come, though she had, with the explosion, quitted her husband as if to hide it from him. She passed into the dusky drawing-room where during

his own prowl shortly previous he had drawn up a blind, so that the light of the street-lamps came in a little at the window. She made for this window, against which she leaned her head, while the Colonel, with his lengthened face, looked after her for a minute and hesitated. He might have been trying to guess what she had really done, to what extent, beyond his knowledge or his conception, in the affairs of these people, she *could* have committed herself. But to hear her cry and yet do her best not to was quickly enough too much for him ; he had known her at other times quite not make the repressive effort, and that hadn't been so bad. He went to her and put his arm round her ; he drew her head to his breast, where, while she gasped, she let it stay a little—all with a patience that presently stilled her. Yet the effect of this small crisis, oddly enough, was not to close their colloquy, with the natural result of sending them to bed : what was between them had opened out further, had somehow, through the sharp show of her feeling, taken a positive stride, had entered, as it were, without more words, the region of the understood, shutting the door after it and bringing them so still more nearly face to face. They remained for some minutes looking at it through the dim window which opened upon the world of human trouble in general and which let the vague light play here and there upon gilt and crystal and colour, the florid features, looming dimly, of Fanny's drawing-room. And the beauty of what thus passed between them, passed with her cry of pain, with her burst of tears, with his wonderment and his kindness and his comfort, with the moments of their silence, above all, which might have represented their sinking together, hand in hand for a time, into the mystic lake where he had begun, as we have hinted, by seeing her paddle alone —the beauty of it was that they now could really talk

better than before, because the basis had at last once for all defined itself. What was the basis, which Fanny absolutely exacted, but that Charlotte and the Prince must be saved—so far as consistently speaking of them as still safe might save them? It did save them somehow for Fanny's troubled mind—for that was the nature of the mind of women. He conveyed to her now, at all events, by refusing her no gentleness, that he had sufficiently got the tip and that the tip was all he had wanted. This remained quite clear even when he presently reverted to what she had told him of her recent passage with Maggie. "I don't altogether see, you know, what you infer from it, or why you infer anything." When he so expressed himself it was quite as if in possession of what they had brought up from the depths.

XI

"I CAN'T say more," this made his companion reply, "than that something in her face, her voice and her whole manner acted upon me as nothing in her had ever acted before; and just for the reason, above all, that I felt her trying her very best—and her very best, poor duck, is very good—to be quiet and natural. It's when one sees people who always *are* natural making little pale pathetic blinking efforts for it—then it is that one knows something's the matter. I can't describe my impression—you'd have had it for yourself. And the only thing that ever *can* be the matter with Maggie is that. By 'that' I mean her beginning to doubt. To doubt, for the first time," Mrs. Assingham wound up, "of her wonderful little judgement of her wonderful little world."

It was impressive, Fanny's vision, and the Colonel, as if himself agitated by it, took another turn of prowling. "To doubt of fidelity—to doubt of friendship! Poor duck indeed! It will go hard with her. But she'll put it all," he concluded, "on Charlotte."

Mrs. Assingham, still darkly contemplative, denied this with a headshake. "She won't 'put' it anywhere. She won't do with it anything any one else would. She'll take it all herself."

"You mean she'll make it out her own fault?"

"Yes—she'll find means somehow to arrive at that."

"Ah then," the Colonel dutifully declared, "she's indeed a little brick!"

"Oh," his wife returned, "you'll see in one way or another to what tune!" And she spoke of a sudden, with an approach to elation—so that, as if immediately feeling his surprise, she turned round to him. "She'll see me somehow through!"

"See *you*——?"

"Yes, me. I'm the worst. For," said Fanny Assingham, now with a harder exaltation, "I did it all. I recognise that—I accept it. She won't cast it up at me—she won't cast up anything. So I throw myself upon her—she'll bear me up." She spoke almost volubly—she held him with her sudden sharpness. "She'll carry the whole weight of us."

There was still nevertheless wonder in it. "You mean she won't mind? I *say*, love——!" And he not unkindly stared. "Then where's the difficulty?"

"There isn't any!" Fanny declared with the same rich emphasis.

It kept him indeed, as by the loss of the thread, looking at her longer. "Ah you mean there isn't any for *us*!"

She met his look for a minute as if it perhaps a little too much imputed a selfishness, a concern for their own surface at any cost. Then she might have been deciding that their own surface was after all what they had most to consider. "Not," she said with dignity, "if we properly keep our heads." She appeared even to signify that they would begin by keeping them now. This was what it was to have at last a constituted basis. "Do you remember what you said to me that night of my first *real* anxiety—after the Foreign Office party?"

"In the carriage—as we came home?" Yes—he could recall it. "Leave them to pull through?"

"Precisely. 'Trust their own wit,' you practically

said, ' to save all appearances.' Well, I've trusted it. I *have* left them to pull through."

He considered. "And your point is that they're not doing so ? "

"I've left them," she went on, "but now I see how and where. I've been leaving them all the while, without knowing it, to *her*."

"To the Princess ? "

"And that's what I mean," Mrs. Assingham pensively pursued. "That's what happened to me with her to-day," she continued to explain. "It came home to me that that's what I've really been doing."

"Oh I see."

"I needn't torment myself. She has taken them over."

The Colonel declared that he "saw" ; yet it was as if, at this, he a little sightlessly stared. "But what then has happened, from one day to the other, to *her* ? What has opened her eyes ? "

"They were never really shut. She misses him."

"Then why hasn't she missed him before ? "

Well, facing him there, among their domestic glooms and glints, Fanny worked it out. "She did —but she wouldn't let herself know it. She had her reason—she wore her blind. Now at last her situation has come to a head. To-day she does know it. And that's illuminating. It has been," Mrs. Assingham wound up, "illuminating to *me*."

Her husband attended, but the momentary effect of his attention was vagueness again, and the refuge of his vagueness was a gasp. "Poor dear little girl ! "

"Ah no—don't pity her ! "

This nevertheless pulled him up. "We mayn't even be sorry for her ? "

"Not now—or at least not yet. It's too soon—that is if it isn't very much too late. This will depend," Mrs. Assingham went on ; "at any rate we

shall see. We might have pitied her before—for all the good it would then have done her ; we might have begun some time ago. Now however she has begun to live. And the way it comes to me, the way it comes to me——" But again she projected her vision.

"The way it comes to you can scarcely be that she'll like it ! "

"The way it comes to me is that she *will* live. The way it comes to me is that she'll triumph."

She said this with so sudden a prophetic flare that it fairly cheered her husband. "Ah then we must back her ! "

"No—we mustn't touch her. We mayn't touch any of them. We must keep our hands off ; we must go on tiptoe. We must simply watch and wait. And meanwhile," said Mrs. Assingham, "we must bear it as we can. That's where we are—and it serves us right. We're in presence."

And so, moving about the room as in communion with shadowy portents, she left it till he questioned again. "In presence of what ? "

"Well, of something possibly beautiful. Beautiful as it *may* come off."

She had paused there before him while he wondered. "You mean she'll get the Prince back ? "

She raised her hand in quick impatience : the suggestion might have been almost abject. "It isn't a question of recovery. It won't be a question of any vulgar struggle. To 'get him back' she must have lost him, and to have lost him she must have had him." With which Fanny shook her head. "What I take her to be waking up to is the truth that all the while she really *hasn't* had him. Never."

"Ah my dear——! " the poor Colonel panted.

"Never ! " his wife inexorably repeated. And she went on without pity. "Do you remember what I

said to you long ago—that evening, just before their marriage, when Charlotte had so suddenly turned up ? "

The smile with which he met this appeal wasn't, it was to be feared, robust. " What haven't you, love, said in your time ? "

" So many things, no doubt, that they make a chance for my having once or twice spoken the truth. I never spoke it more, at all events, than when I declared, on that occasion, that Maggie was the creature in the world to whom a wrong thing could least be communicated. It was as if her imagination had been closed to it, her sense altogether sealed. That therefore," Fanny continued, " is what will now *have* to happen. Her sense will have to open."

" I see." He nodded. " To the wrong." He nodded again almost cheerfully—as if he had been keeping the peace with a baby or a lunatic. " To the very, *very* wrong."

But his wife's spirit, after its effort of wing, was able to remain higher. " To what's called Evil—with a very big E : for the first time in her life. To the discovery of it, to the knowledge of it, to the crude experience of it." And she gave, for the possibility, the largest measure. " To the harsh bewildering brush, the daily chilling breath of it. Unless indeed " —and here Mrs. Assingham noted a limit—" unless indeed, as yet (so far as she has come, and if she comes no further), simply to the suspicion and the dread. What we shall see is whether that mere dose of alarm will prove enough."

He considered. " But enough for what then, dear —if not enough to break her heart ? "

" Enough to give her a shaking ! " Mrs. Assingham rather oddly replied. " To give her, I mean, the right one. The right one won't break her heart. It will make her," she explained—" well, it will make her,

by way of a change, understand one or two things in the world."

"But isn't it a pity," the Colonel asked, "that they should happen to be the one or two that will be the most disagreeable to her?"

"Oh 'disagreeable'——? They'll have *had* to be disagreeable — to show her a little where she is. They'll have had to be disagreeable to make her sit up. They'll have had to be disagreeable to make her decide to live."

Bob Assingham was now at the window, while his companion slowly revolved; he had lighted a cigarette, for final patience, and he seemed vaguely to "time" her as she moved to and fro. He had at the same time to do justice to the lucidity she had at last attained, and it was doubtless by way of expression of this teachability that he let his eyes roll, for a minute, as from the force of feeling, over the upper dusk of the room. He had thought of the response his wife's words ideally implied. "Decide to live—ah yes!—for her child."

"Oh bother her child!"—and he had never felt so snubbed, for an exemplary view, as when Fanny now stopped short. "To live, you poor dear, for her father—which is another pair of sleeves!" And Mrs. Assingham's whole ample ornamented person irradiated, with this, the truth that had begun, under so much handling, to glow. "Any idiot can do things for her child. She'll have a motive more original, and we shall see how it will work her. She'll have to save *him*."

"To 'save' him——?"

"To keep her father from her own knowledge. *That*"—and she seemed to see it, before her, in her husband's very eyes—"will be work cut out!" With which, as at the highest conceivable climax, she wound up their colloquy. "Good-night!"

There was something in her manner, however—or in the effect at least of this supreme demonstration—that had fairly, and by a single touch, lifted him to her side ; so that, after she had turned her back to regain the landing and the staircase, he overtook her, before she had begun to mount, with the ring of excited perception. " Ah but, you know, that's rather jolly ! "

" ' Jolly '——? " She turned upon it again from the foot of the staircase.

" I mean it's rather charming."

" ' Charming '——? " It had still to be their law, a little, that she was tragic when he was comic.

" I mean it's rather beautiful. You just said yourself it would be. Only," he pursued promptly, with the impetus of this idea, and as if it had suddenly touched with light for him connexions hitherto dim—" only I don't quite see why that very care for him which has carried her to such other lengths, precisely, as affect one as so ' rum,' hasn't also by the same stroke made her notice a little more what has been going on."

" Ah there you are ! It's the question that I've all along been asking myself." She had rested her eyes on the carpet, but she raised them as she pursued —she let him have it straight. " And it's the question of an idiot."

" An idiot——? "

" Well, the idiot that *I've* been in all sorts of ways —so often of late have I asked it. You're excusable since you ask it but now. The answer I saw to-day has all the while been staring me in the face."

" Then what in the world is it ? "

" Why the very intensity of her conscience about him—the very passion of her brave little piety. That's the way it has worked," Mrs. Assingham explained—" and I admit it to have been as ' rum ' a way as possible. But it has been working from a

'rum' start. From the moment the dear man married to ease his daughter off and it then happened by an extraordinary perversity that the very opposite effect was produced——!" With the renewed vision of this fatality, however, she could give but a desperate shrug.

"I see," the Colonel sympathetically mused. "That *was* a rum start."

But his very response, as she again flung up her arms, seemed to make her sense for a moment intolerable. "Yes—there I am! I was really at the bottom of it," she declared; "I don't know what possessed me—but I planned for him, I goaded him on." With which, however, the next moment, she took herself up. "Or rather I *do* know what possessed me—for wasn't he beset with ravening women, right and left, and didn't he quite pathetically appeal for protection, didn't he quite charmingly show one how he needed and desired it? Maggie," she thus lucidly continued, "couldn't, with a new life of her own, give herself up to doing for him in the future all she had done in the past—to fencing him in, to keeping him safe and keeping *them* off. One perceived this," she went on—"out of the abundance of one's affection and one's sympathy." It all blessedly came back to her—when it wasn't all for the fiftieth time obscured, in face of the present facts, by anxiety and compunction. "One was no doubt a meddlesome fool; one always *is*, to think one sees people's lives for them better than they see them for themselves. But one's excuse here," she insisted, "was that these people clearly *didn't* see them for themselves—didn't see them at all. It struck one for very pity—that they were making a mess of such charming material; that they were but wasting it and letting it go. They didn't know *how* to live—and somehow one couldn't, if one took an interest in them at all, simply stand and

see it. That's what I pay for "—and the poor woman, in straighter communion with her companion's intelligence at this moment, she appeared to feel, than she had ever been before, let him have the whole of the burden of her consciousness. "I always pay for it, sooner or later, my sociable, my damnable, my unnecessary interest. Nothing of course would suit me but that it should fix itself also on Charlotte—Charlotte who was hovering there on the edge of our lives when not beautifully and a trifle mysteriously flitting across them, and who was a piece of waste and a piece of threatened failure just as, for any possible good to the world, Mr. Verver and Maggie were. It began to come over me in the watches of the night that Charlotte was a person who *could* keep off ravening women —without being one herself, either, in the vulgar way of the others; and that this service to Mr. Verver would be a sweet employment for her future. There was something of course that might have stopped me: you know, you know what I mean—it looks at me," she veritably moaned, "out of your face! But all I can say is that it didn't; the reason largely being—once I had fallen in love with the beautiful symmetry of my plan—that I seemed to feel sure Maggie would accept Charlotte, whereas I didn't quite make out either what other woman, or what other *kind* of woman, one could think of her accepting."

"I see—I see." She had paused, meeting all the while his listening look, and the fever of her retrospect had so risen with her talk that the desire was visibly strong in him to meet her, on his side, but with cooling breath. "One quite understands, my dear."

Yet it only kept her there sombre. "I naturally see, love, what you understand; which sits again perfectly in your eyes. You see that I saw that Maggie would accept her in helpless ignorance. Yes, dearest "—and the grimness of her lucidity suddenly

once more possessed her: "you've only to tell me that that knowledge was my reason for what I did. How, when you do, can I stand up to you? You see," she said with an ineffable headshake, "that I don't stand up! I'm down, down, down," she declared; "yet"—she as quickly added—"there's just one little thing that helps to save my life." And she kept him waiting but an instant. "They might easily—they would perhaps even certainly—have done something worse."

He thought. "Worse than that Charlotte——?"

"Ah don't tell me," she cried, "that there *could* have been nothing worse. There might, as they were, have been many things. Charlotte, in her way, is extraordinary."

He was almost simultaneous. "Extraordinary!"

"She observes the forms," said Fanny Assingham.

"With the Prince——?"

"*For* the Prince. And with the others," she went on. "With Mr. Verver—wonderfully. But above all with Maggie. And the forms"—she had to do even *them* justice—"are two thirds of conduct. Say he had married a woman who would have made a hash of them."

But he jerked back. "Ah my dear, I wouldn't say it for the world!"

"Say," she none the less pursued, "he had married a woman the Prince would *really* have cared for."

"You mean then he doesn't care for Charlotte——?"

This was still a new view to jump to, and the Colonel, perceptibly, wished to make sure of the necessity of the effort. For that, while he stared, his wife allowed him time; at the end of which she simply said: "No!"

"Then what on earth are they up to?" Still however she only looked at him; so that, standing

there before her with his hands in his pockets, he had time to risk soothingly another question. "Are the 'forms' you speak of—that are two thirds of conduct—what will be keeping her now, by your hypothesis, from coming home with him till morning?"

"Yes—absolutely. *Their* forms."

"'Theirs'——?"

"Maggie's and Mr. Verver's—those they *impose* on Charlotte and the Prince. Those," she developed, "that so perversely, as I say, have succeeded in setting themselves up as the right ones."

He considered—but only now at last really to relapse into woe. "Your 'perversity,' my dear, is exactly what I don't understand. The state of things existing hasn't grown, like a field of mushrooms, in a night. Whatever they, all round, may be in for now is at least the consequence of what they've *done*. Are they mere helpless victims of fate?"

Well, Fanny at last had the courage of it. "Yes—they are. To be so abjectly innocent—that *is* to be victims of fate."

"And Charlotte and the Prince are abjectly innocent——?"

It took her another minute, but she rose to the full height. "Yes. That is they *were*—as much so in their way as the others. There were beautiful intentions all round. The Prince's and Charlotte's were beautiful—of *that* I had my faith. They *were*—I'd go to the stake. Otherwise," she added, "I should have been a wretch. And I've not been a wretch. I've only been a double-dyed donkey."

"Ah then," he asked, "what does our muddle make *them* to have been?"

"Well, too much taken up with considering each other. You may call such a mistake as that by whatever name you please; it at any rate means, all round, their case. It illustrates the misfortune,"

said Mrs. Assingham gravely, "of being too, too charming."

This was another matter that took some following, but the Colonel again did his best. "Yes, but to whom?—doesn't it rather depend on that? To whom have the Prince and Charlotte then been too charming?"

"To each other in the first place—obviously. And then both of them together to Maggie."

"To Maggie?" he wonderingly echoed.

"To Maggie." She was now crystalline. "By having accepted, from the first, so guilelessly—yes, so guilelessly themselves—her guileless idea of still having her father, of keeping him fast, in her life."

"Then isn't one supposed, in common humanity, and if one hasn't quarrelled with him, and one has the means, and he, on his side, doesn't drink or kick up rows—isn't one supposed to keep one's aged parent in one's life?"

"Certainly—when there aren't particular reasons against it. That there may be others than his getting drunk is exactly the moral of what's before us. In the first place Mr. Verver isn't aged."

The Colonel just hung fire—but it came. "Then why the deuce does he—oh poor dear man!—behave as if he were?"

She took a moment to meet it. "How do you know how he behaves?"

"Well, my own love, we see how Charlotte does!"

Again, at this, she faltered; but again she rose. "Ah isn't my whole point that he's charming to her?"

"Doesn't it depend a bit on what she regards as charming?"

She faced the question as if it were flippant, then with a headshake of dignity she brushed it away. "It's Mr. Verver who's really young—it's Charlotte

who's really old. And what I was saying," she added, " isn't affected——!"

" You were saying "—he did her the justice—" that they're all guileless."

" That they were. Guileless all at first—quite extraordinarily. It's what I mean by their failure to see that the more they took for granted they could work together the more they were really working apart. For I repeat," Fanny went on, " that I really believe Charlotte and the Prince honestly to have made up their minds, originally, that their very esteem for Mr. Verver—which was serious, as well it might be !—would save them."

" I see." The Colonel inclined himself. " And save *him*."

" It comes to the same thing ! "

" Then save Maggie."

" That comes," said Mrs. Assingham, " to something a little different. For Maggie has done the most."

He wondered. " What do you call the most ? "

" Well, she did it originally—she *began* the vicious circle. For that—though you make round eyes at my associating her with ' vice '—is simply what it has been. It's their mutual consideration, all round, that has made it the bottomless gulf ; and they're really so embroiled but because, in their way, they've been so improbably *good*."

" In their way—yes ! " the Colonel grinned.

" Which was above all Maggie's way." No flicker of his ribaldry was anything to her now. " Maggie had in the first place to make up to her father for her having suffered herself to become—poor little dear, as she believed—so intensely married. Then she had to make up to her husband for taking so much of the time they might otherwise have spent together to make this reparation to Mr. Verver perfect. And her

way to do this, precisely, was by allowing the Prince the use, the enjoyment, whatever you may call it, of Charlotte to cheer his path—by instalments, as it were—in proportion as she herself, making sure her father was all right, might be missed from his side. By so much, at the same time, however," Mrs. Assingham further explained, " by so much as she took her young stepmother, for this purpose, away from Mr. Verver, by just so much did this too strike her as something again to be made up for. It has saddled her, you'll easily see, with a positively new obligation to her father, an obligation created and aggravated by her unfortunate even if quite heroic little sense of justice. She began with wanting to show him that his marriage could never, under whatever temptation of her own bliss with the Prince, become for her a pretext for deserting or neglecting him. Then that, in its order, entailed her wanting to show the Prince that she recognised how the other desire—this wish to remain, intensely, the same passionate little daughter she had always been—involved in some degree and just for the present, so to speak, her neglecting and deserting *him*. I quite hold," Fanny with characteristic amplitude parenthesised, " that a person can mostly feel but one passion—one *tender* passion, that is—at a time. Only that doesn't hold good for our primary and instinctive attachments, the ' voice of blood,' such as one's feeling for a parent or a brother. Those may be intense and yet not prevent other intensities—as you'll recognise, my dear, when you remember how I continued, *tout bêtement*, to adore my mother, whom you didn't adore, for years after I had begun to adore you. Well, Maggie "—she kept it up—" is in the same situation as I was, *plus* complications from which I was, thank heaven, exempt : *plus* the complication above all of not having in the least begun with the sense for com-

plications that I should have had. Before she knew it at any rate her little scruples and her little lucidities, which were really so divinely blind—her feverish little sense of justice, as I say—had brought the two others together as her grossest misconduct couldn't have done. And now she knows something or other has happened—yet hasn't heretofore known what. She has only piled up her remedy, poor child—something that she has earnestly but confusedly seen as her necessary policy; piled it on top of the policy, on top of the remedy, that she at first thought out for herself and that would really have needed since then so much modification. Her only modification has been the growth of her necessity to prevent her father's wondering if all, in their life in common, *may* be so certainly for the best. She has now as never before to keep him unconscious that, peculiar, if he makes a point of it, as their situation is, there's anything in it all uncomfortable or disagreeable, anything morally the least out of the way. She has to keep touching it up to make it, each day, each month, look natural and normal to him; so that—God forgive me the comparison!—she's like an old woman who has taken to 'painting' and who has to lay it on thicker, to carry it off with a greater audacity, with a greater impudence even, the older she grows." And Fanny stood a moment captivated with the image she had thrown off. "I like the idea of Maggie audacious and impudent—learning to be so to gloss things over. She could—she even will, yet, I believe—learn it, for that sacred purpose, consummately, diabolically. For from the moment the dear man should see it's all *rouge*——!" She paused, staring at the vision.

It imparted itself even to Bob. "*Then* the fun would begin?" As it but made her look at him hard, however, he amended the form of his inquiry.

"You mean that in that case she *will*, charming creature, be lost?"

She was silent a moment more. "As I've told you before, she won't be lost if her father's saved. She'll see that as salvation enough."

The Colonel took it in. "Then she's a little heroine."

"Rather—she's a little heroine. But it's his innocence, above all," Mrs. Assingham added, "that will pull them through."

Her companion, at this, focussed again Mr. Verver's innocence. "It's awfully quaint."

"Of course it's awfully quaint! That it's awfully quaint, that the pair are awfully quaint, quaint with all *our* dear old quaintness—by which I don't mean yours and mine, but that of my own sweet country-people, from whom I've so deplorably degenerated—that," Mrs. Assingham declared, "was originally the head and front of their appeal to me and of my interest in them. And of course I shall feel them quainter still," she rather ruefully subjoined, "before they've done with me!"

This might be, but it wasn't what most stood in the Colonel's way. "You believe so in Mr. Verver's innocence after two years of Charlotte?"

She stared. "But the whole point is just that two years of Charlotte are what he hasn't really—or what you may call undividedly—had."

"Any more than Maggie by your theory, eh, has 'really or undividedly,' had four of the Prince? It takes all she hasn't had," the Colonel conceded, "to account for the innocence that in her too so leaves us in admiration."

So far as it might be ribald again she let this pass. "It takes a great many things to account for Maggie. What's definite at all events is that—strange though this be—her effort for her father has up to now

sufficiently succeeded. She has made him, she *makes* him, accept the tolerably obvious oddity of their relation, all round, for part of the game. Behind her there, protected and amused and, as it were, exquisitely humbugged—the Principino, in whom he delights, always aiding—he has safely and serenely enough suffered the conditions of his life to pass for those he had sublimely projected. He hadn't worked them out in detail—any more than I had, heaven pity me !—and the queerness has been exactly in the detail. This, for him, is what it *was* to have married Charlotte. And they both," she neatly wound up, "help."

"'Both'——?"

"I mean that if Maggie, always in the breach, makes it seem to him all so flourishingly to fit, Charlotte does her part not less. And her part is very large. Charlotte," Fanny declared, "works like a horse."

So there it all was, and her husband looked at her a minute across it. "And what does the Prince work like ?"

She fixed him in return. "Like a Prince !" Whereupon, breaking short off to ascend to her room, she presented her highly-decorated back—in which, in odd places, controlling the complications of its aspect, the ruby or the garnet, the turquoise and the topaz, gleamed like faint symbols of the wit that pinned together the satin patches of her argument.

He watched her as if she left him positively under the impression of her mastery of her subject ; yes, as if the real upshot of the drama before them was but that he had, when it came to the tight places of life —as life had shrunk for him now—the most luminous of wives. He turned off, in this view of her majestic retreat, the comparatively faint little electric lamp that had presided over their talk ; then he went up as

immediately behind her as the billows of her amber train allowed, making out how all the clearness they had conquered was even for herself a relief—how at last the sense of the amplitude of her exposition sustained and floated her. Joining her however on the landing above, where she had already touched a metallic point into light, he found she had done perhaps even more to create than to extinguish in him the germ of a curiosity. He held her a minute longer —there was another plum in the pie. "What did you mean some minutes ago by his not caring for Charlotte?"

"The Prince's? By his not 'really' caring?" She recalled, after a little, benevolently enough. "I mean that men don't, when it has all been too easy. That's how, in nine cases out of ten, a woman *is* treated who has risked her life. You asked me just now how he works," she added; "but you might better perhaps have asked me how he plays."

Well, he made it up. "Like a Prince?"

"Like a Prince. He *is* profoundly a Prince. For that," she said with expression, "he's—beautifully—a case. They're far rarer, even in the 'highest circles,' than they pretend to be—and that's what makes so much of his value. He's perhaps one of the very last—the last of the real ones. So it is we must take him. We must take him all round."

The Colonel considered. "And how must Charlotte—if anything happens—take him?"

The question held her a minute, and while she waited with her eyes on him she put out a grasping hand to his arm, in the flesh of which he felt her answer distinctly enough registered. Thus she gave him, standing off a little, the firmest longest deepest injunction he had ever received from her. "Nothing —in spite of everything—*will* happen. Nothing *has* happened. Nothing *is* happening."

He looked a trifle disappointed. "I see. For *us*."

"For us. For whom else?" And he was to feel indeed how she wished him to understand it. "We know nothing on earth——!" It was an undertaking he must sign.

So he wrote, as it were, his name. "We know nothing on earth." It was like the soldiers' watch-word at night.

"We're as innocent," she went on in the same way, "as babes."

"Why not rather say," he asked, "as innocent as they themselves are?"

"Ah for the best of reasons! Because we're much more so."

He wondered. "But how can we be more——?"

"For them? Oh easily! We can be anything."

"Absolute idiots then?"

"Absolute idiots. And oh," Fanny breathed, "the way it will rest us!"

Well, he looked as if there were something in that. "But won't they know we're not?"

She barely hesitated. "Charlotte and the Prince think we are—which is so much gained. Mr. Verver believes in our intelligence -but he doesn't matter."

"And Maggie? Doesn't *she* know——?"

"That we see before our noses?" Yes, this indeed took longer. "Oh so far as she may guess it she'll give no sign. So it comes to the same thing."

He raised his eyebrows. "Comes to our not being able to help her?"

"That's the way we *shall* help her."

"By looking like fools?"

She threw up her hands. "She only wants, herself, to look like a bigger! So there we are!" With

which she brushed it away — his conformity was promised. Something nevertheless still held her; it broke, to her own vision, as a last wave of clearness. "Moreover *now*," she said, "I see! I mean," she added, "what you were asking me: how I knew to-day in Eaton Square that Maggie's awake." And she had indeed visibly got it. "It was by seeing them together."

"Seeing her with her father?" He fell behind again. "But you've seen her often enough before."

"Never with my present eyes. For nothing like such a test—that of this length of the others' absence together—has hitherto occurred."

"Possibly! But if she and Mr. Verver insisted upon it——?"

"Why is it such a test? Because it has become one without their intending it. It has spoiled, so to speak, on their hands."

"It has soured, eh?" the Colonel said.

"The word's horrible—say rather it has 'changed.' Perhaps," Fanny went on, "she did wish to see how much she can bear. In that case she *has* seen. Only it was she alone who—about the visit -insisted. Her father insists on nothing. And she watches him do it."

Her husband looked impressed. "Watches him?"

"For the first faint sign. I mean of his noticing. It doesn't, as I tell you, come. But she's there for it—to see. And I felt," she continued, "*how* she's there; I caught her, as it were, in the fact. She couldn't keep it from me—though she left her post on purpose: came home with me to throw dust in my eyes. I took it all—her dust; but it was what showed me." With which supreme lucidity she reached the door of her room. "Luckily it showed

me also how she has succeeded. Nothing—from him—*has* come."

"You're so awfully sure?"

"Sure. Nothing *will*. Good-night," she said. "She'll die first."

END OF VOL. I

Printed in Great Britain by R. & R. Clark, Limited, *Edinburgh.*